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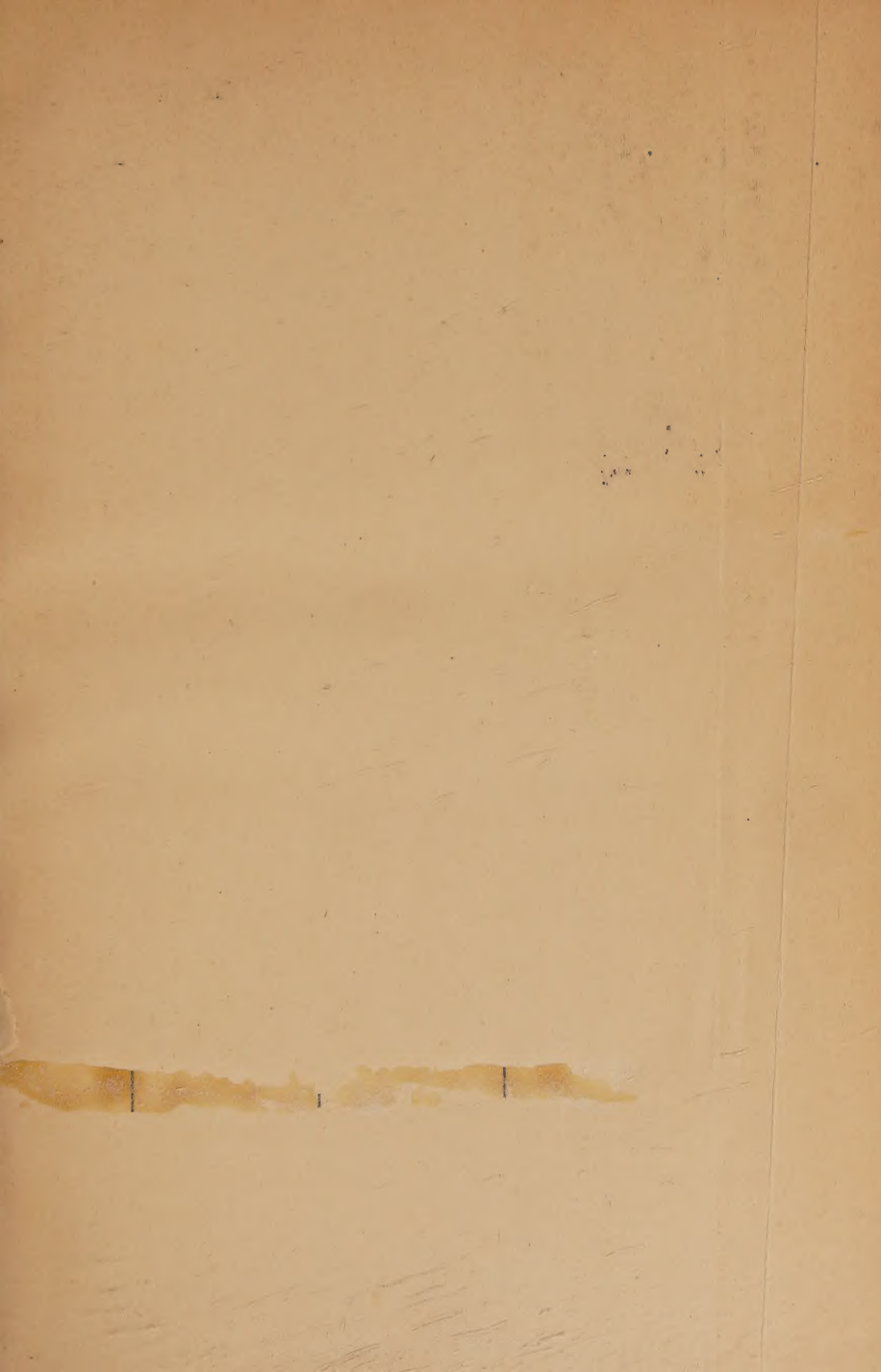


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H. DE BALZAC

THE JEALOUSIES OF A
COUNTRY TOWN
THE THIRTEEN

FOURTH EDITION

HE LISTENED PATIENTLY— TO TALES OF THE LITTLE WOES
OF LIFE IN A COUNTRY TOWN.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

JOHN F. BAINBRIDGE

1895

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H. DE BALZAC

THE JEALOUSIES OF A
COUNTRY TOWN
THE THIRTEEN

AND OTHER STORIES

TRANSLATED BY

ELLEN MARRIAGE and JNO. RUDD, B. A.

WITH PREFACES BY

GEORGE SAINTSBURY



PHILADELPHIA

THE GEBBIE PUBLISHING CO., Ltd.

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CONTENTS

VOLUME I.

	PAGE
<i>PREFACE</i>	ix
<i>THE JEALOUSIES OF A COUNTRY TOWN</i>	
THE OLD MAID	I
THE COLLECTION OF ANTIQUITIES	153
<i>A MARRIAGE SETTLEMENT</i>	313

VOLUME II.

<i>PREFACE</i>	ix
<i>THE THIRTEEN</i>	
AUTHOR'S PREFACE	I
I. FERRAGUS	8
II. THE DUCHESS DE LANGEAIS	139
<i>MAÎTRE CORNELIUS</i>	298
<i>GAMBARA</i>	367

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

VOLUME I.

HE LISTENED PATIENTLY—TO TALES OF THE LITTLE WOES OF LIFE IN A COUNTRY TOWN (p. 8)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	PAGE
AT ONCE HE TURNED TO LOOK AT ATHANASE	80
HE SAW WITH DEEP EMOTION, ALMOST BEYOND CONTROL, HIS PATRON STANDING IN THE MIDST OF THE EMPTY COURT- YARD	156
"WHAT IS IT, MONSIEUR?" SHE ASKED, POSING IN HER DIS- ORDER	250
	<i>Drawn by W. Boucher.</i>
THE YOUNG MAN ARRIVED NEXT MORNING	343
	<i>Drawn by F. C. Tilney.</i>

VOLUME II.

"YOU ARE MISTAKEN, MADEMOISELLE, MY WIFE COULD NOT POSSIBLY——"	78
A GIRL'S BODY STRANDED THAT MORNING ON THE BANK	132
"SOUND YOURSELF; IF YOU HAVE NOT COURAGE ENOUGH, HERE IS MY DAGGER"	188
HE STOOD UNDER THE WALL TO HEAR THE MUSIC OF THE ORGAN	293
	<i>Drawn by W. Boucher.</i>

PREFACE.

THE two stories of "Les Rivalités" are more closely connected than it was always Balzac's habit to connect the tales which he united under a common heading. Not only are both devoted to the society of Alençon—a town and neighborhood to which he had evidently strong, though it is not clearly known what, attractions—not only is the Chevalier de Valois a notable figure in each; but the community, imparted by the elaborate study of the old *noblesse* in each case, is even greater than either of these ties could give. Indeed, if instead of "Les Rivalités" the author had chosen some label indicating the study of the *noblesse qui s'en va*, it might almost have been preferable. He did not, however; and though in a man who so constantly changed his titles and his arrangements the actual ones are not excessively authoritative, they have authority.

"La Vieille Fille," despite a certain tone of levity—which, to do Balzac justice, is not common with him, and which is rather hard upon the poor heroine—is one of the best and liveliest things he ever did. The opening picture of the chevalier, though, like other things of its author's, especially in his overtures, liable to the charge of being elaborated a little too much, is one of the very best things of its kind, and is a sort of *locus classicus* for its subject. The whole picture of country town society is about as good as it can be; and the only blot that I know is to be found in the sentimental Athanase, who was not quite within Balzac's province, extensive as that province is. If we compare Mr. Augustus Moddle, we shall see one of the not too numerous instances in which Dickens has a clear advantage over Balzac; and if it be retorted that Balzac's object was not to present a merely ridiculous object, the rejoinder is

chapter divisions in this latter. The whole of the "Cabinet" was published in book form (with "Gambara" to follow it) in 1839. There were some changes here; and the divisions were abolished when the whole book in 1844 entered the Comédie. One of the greatest mistakes which, in my humble judgment, the organizers of the *édition définitive* have made, is their adoption of Balzac's never executed separation of the pair and deletion of the excellent joint-title "Les Rivalités."

If Balzac had been acquainted with the works of Chaucer (which would have been extremely surprising) he might have called "Le Contrat de Mariage" "A Legend of Bad Women." He has not been exactly sparing of studies in that particular kind; but he has surpassed himself here. Mme. de Maufrigneuse redeems herself by her character, however imperfectly supported, of *grande dame*, Beatrix de Rochefide by a certain naturalness and weakness, Flore Brazier by circumstances and education, others by other things. But Madame Evangelista and her daughter Natalie may be said to be bad all through—thoroughly poisonous persons who, much more than the actual Milady of "Les Trois Mousquetaires" (there was some charm in her), deserved to be taken and "justified" by lynch law. If the "Thirteen" (who were rather interested in the matter) had descended upon both in the fashion of d'Artagnan and his friends, I do not know that any one would have had much right to complain. How far the picture is exaggerated must be a question to be decided partly by individual experience, partly by other arguments. Although I am not always disposed to defend Balzac from the charge of exaggeration, I think he is fairly free from it here.

Madame Evangelista, beside the usual womanly desire to make a figure in the capital, has (not to excuse, but to explain her) the equally natural tendency to regard everybody outside her own family as an at least possible enemy to be "exploited" pitilessly, together with bad blood which, though luckily not common, is by no means impossible nor even ex-

tremely rare. Her daughter, as Balzac has acutely suggested, both here and elsewhere, is, like not a few women, destitute of that sense of abiding gratitude for pleasure mutually enjoyed which tempers the evil tendencies of the male sex to no inconsiderable extent. She has never cared for her husband; she has no morals; and (as in another book and subject, her letter to Félix de Vandenesse, well deserved as it is in the particular instance, shows) she has the fortunately not universal but excessively dangerous combination of utter selfishness with very clear-sighted commonsense.

The men are equally true, and much more agreeable. It is noteworthy that here only does Balzac's pattern Byronic dandy Marsay cut a distinctly agreeable figure. He is still something of a coxcomb, but he is, as he is not very often, a gentleman; he is, as he is scarcely ever, a good fellow; and he deserves his character as *un homme très fort*, to say the least, better than he does in some places. The two family lawyers are excellent. As for Paul de Manerville, the unfortunate *fleur des pois* (the title for some time of the book) himself, he is one of the profoundest of Balzac's studies, and it was perhaps rather unkind of his creator to call him a *niais*. At any rate, he was not more so than that very creator when he committed slow suicide by waiting and working till a woman, who cannot have been worth the trouble, at last made up her mind to "derogate" a little, and, without any pecuniary sacrifice, to exchange the position of widow of a member of a second-rate aristocracy for that of wife of one of the foremost living men of letters in Europe, who was himself technically a gentleman. Marsay's letters to Paul only put pointedly what the whole story puts suggestively, the great truth that you may "see life" without knowing it, and that for a certain kind of respectable person the sowing of wild oats is a far more dangerous kind of husbandry than for the wildest profligate. It is true that Paul has exceedingly bad luck, and that in countries other than France he might have

subsided into a most respectable and comfortable country gentleman. But as a great authority, whom he probably knew, Paul de Florac, his namesake and contemporary, remarked, "Do not adopt our institutions *à demi*," so it would seem to be a maxim that the two kinds of life cannot be combined—at least, that seems to be Balzac's moral.

The first titles of the two main stories have been given above. "La Fleur des pois," as such, appeared in no newspaper, but in the "Scènes de la Vie Privée" of 1834-35. It had three divisions, which disappeared in the first edition of the Comédie, when also the title was changed. Its companion was printed under its first title, and with fourteen chapter divisions, in a paper called "La Législature," between July and September, 1842. Balzac at first meant to call it "Les Jeunes Gens,"* but changed this to "Le Danger des Mystifications," and that again to the present form, when it appeared (with "La fausse Maîtresse") as a book in 1844. Next year it was classed in the Comédie, undergoing the usual process of deletion of the chapter divisions and headings.

G. S.

* This refers to "A Start in Life."



THE JEALOUSIES OF A COUNTRY TOWN.

THE OLD MAID

(La Vieille Fille).

*To M. Eugène Auguste Georges Louis Midy de la
Greneraye Surville, Civil Engineer of the Corps-Royal,
a token of affection from his brother-in-law.*

DE BALZAC.

PLENTY of people must have come across at least one Chevalier de Valois in the provinces ; there was one in Normandy, another was extant at Bourges, a third flourished at Alençon in the year 1816, and the South very likely possessed one of its own. But we are not here concerned with the numbering of the Valois tribe. Some of them, no doubt, were about as much of Valois as Louis XIV. was a Bourbon ; and every chevalier was so slightly acquainted with the rest that it was anything but politic to mention one of them when speaking to another. All of them, however, agreed to leave the Bourbons in perfect tranquillity on the throne of France, for it is a little too well proven that Henri IV. succeeded to the crown in default of heirs male in the Orléans, otherwise the Valois branch ; so that if any Valois exist at all, they must be descendants of Charles of Valois, Duke of Angoulême, and Marie Touchet ; and even there the direct line was extinct (unless proof to the contrary is forthcoming) in the person of the Abbé de Rothelin. As for the Valois Saint-Remy, descended from Henri II., they likewise came to an end with the too famous Lamothe-Valois of the Diamond Necklace affair.

Every one of the chevaliers, if information is correct, was, like the chevalier of Alençon, an elderly noble, tall, lean, and without fortune. The Bourges chevalier had emigrated, the Touraine Valois went into hiding during the Revolution, and the Alençon chevalier was mixed up in the Vendean war, and implicated to some extent in Chouannerie.* The last-named gentleman spent the most part of his youth in Paris, where, at the age of thirty, the Revolution broke in upon his career of conquests. Accepted as a true Valois by persons of the highest quality in his province, the Chevalier de Valois d'Alençon (like his namesakes) was remarkable for his fine manners, and had evidently been accustomed to move in the best society.

He dined out every day, and played cards of an evening, and, thanks to one of his weaknesses, was regarded as a great wit; he had a habit of relating a host of anecdotes of the times of Louis Quinze, and those who heard his stories for the first time thought them passably well narrated. The Chevalier de Valois, moreover, had one virtue: he refrained from repeating his own good sayings, and never alluded to his conquests, albeit his smiles and airs were delightfully indiscreet. The old gentleman took full advantage of the old-fashioned Voltairean noble's privilege of staying away from mass, but his irreligion was very tenderly dealt with out of regard for his devotion to the Royalist cause.

One of his most remarked graces (Molé must have learned it of him) was his way of taking snuff from an old-fashioned snuff-box with a portrait of a lady on the lid. The Princess Goritzza, a lovely Hungarian, had been famous for her beauty toward the end of the reign of Louis XV. ; and the chevalier could never speak without emotion of the foreign great lady whom he loved in his youth, for whom he had fought a duel with M. de Lauzun.

But by this time the chevalier had lived fifty-eight years,

* The Royalist rising in Vendée.

and if he owned to but fifty of them, he might safely indulge himself in that harmless deceit. Thin, fair-complexioned men, among other privileges, retain their youthfulness of shape which in men, as in women, contributes as much as anything to stave off any appearance of age. And, indeed, it is a fact that all the life, or rather, all the grace, which is the expression of life, lies in the figure. Among the chevalier's personal traits, mention must be made of the portentous nose with which nature had endowed him. It cut a pallid countenance sharply into two sections which seemed to have nothing to do with each other; so much so, indeed, that only one-half of his face would flush with the exertion of digestion after dinner; all the glow being confined to the left side, a phenomenon worthy of note in times when physiology is so much occupied with the human heart. M. de Valois' health was not apparently robust, judging by his long, thin legs, lean frame, and sallow complexion; but he ate like an ogre, alleging, doubtless by way of excuse for his voracity, that he suffered from a complaint known in the provinces as a "hot liver." The flush on his left cheek confirmed the story; but in a land where meals are developed on the lines of thirty or forty dishes, and last for four hours at a stretch, the chevalier's abnormal appetite might well seem to be a special mark of the favor of Providence vouchsafed to the good town. That flush on the left cheek, according to divers medical authorities, is a sign of prodigality of heart; and, indeed, the chevalier's past record of gallantry might seem to confirm a professional dictum for which the present chronicler (most fortunately) is in nowise responsible. But in spite of these symptoms, M. de Valois was of nervous temperament, and in consequence long-lived; and if his liver was hot, to use the old-fashioned phrase, his heart was not a whit less inflammable. If there was a line worn here and there in his face, and a silver thread or so in his hair, an experienced eye would have discerned in these signs and tokens the stigmata of desire, the furrows traced by

past pleasure. And, in fact, in his face, the unmistakable marks of the crow's foot and the serpent's tooth took the shape of the delicate wrinkles so prized at the court of Cytherea.

Everything about the gallant chevalier revealed the "ladies' man." So minutely careful was he over his ablutions that it was a pleasure to see his cheeks; they might have been brushed over with some miraculous water. That portion of his head which the hair refused to hide from view shone like ivory. His eyebrows, like his hair, had a youthful look, so carefully was their growth trained and regulated by the comb. A naturally fair skin seemed to be yet further whitened by some mysterious preparation; and while the chevalier never used scent, there was about him, as it were, a perfume of youth which enhanced the freshness of his looks. His hands, that told of race, were as carefully kept as if they belonged to some coxcomb of the gentler sex; you could not help noticing those rose-pink neatly-trimmed finger-nails. Indeed, but for his lordly superlative nose, the chevalier would have looked like a doll.

It takes some resolution to spoil this portrait with the admission of a foible; the chevalier put cotton wool in his ears, and still continued to wear earrings—two tiny negroes' heads set with brilliants. They were of admirable workmanship, it is true, and their owner was so far attached to the singular appendages that he used to justify his fancy by saying that his "sick headaches had left him since his ears were pierced." He used to suffer from sick headaches. The chevalier is not held up as a flawless character; but even if an old bachelor's heart sends too much blood to his face, is he never therefore to be forgiven for his adorable absurdities? Perhaps (who knows?) there are sublime secrets hidden away beneath them. And beside, the Chevalier de Valois made amends for his negroes' heads with such a variety of other and different charms that society ought to have felt itself sufficiently com-

pensated. He really was at great pains to conceal his age and to make himself agreeable.

First and foremost, witness the extreme care which he gave to his linen, the one distinction in dress which a gentleman may permit himself in modern days. The chevalier's linen was invariably fine and white, as befitted a noble. His coat, though remarkably neat, was always somewhat worn, but spotless and uncreased. The preservation of this garment bordered on the miraculous in the opinion of those who noticed the chevalier's elegant indifference on this head; not that he went so far as to scrape his clothes with broken glass (a refinement invented by the Prince of Wales), but he set himself to carry out the first principles of dress as laid down by Englishmen of the very highest and finest fashion, and this with a personal element of coxcombry which Alençon was scarcely capable of appreciating. Does the world owe no esteem to those that take such pains for it? And what was all this labor but the fulfillment of that very hardest of sayings in the Gospel, which bids us return good for evil? The freshness of the toilet, the care for dress, suited well with the chevalier's blue eyes, ivory teeth, and bland personality; still, the superannuated Adonis had nothing masculine in his appearance, and it would seem that he employed the illusion of the toilet to hide the ravages of other than military campaigns.

To tell the whole truth, the chevalier had a voice singularly at variance with his delicate fairness. So full was it and sonorous, that you would have been startled by the sound of it unless, with certain observers of human nature, you held the theory that the voice was only what might be expected of such a nose. With something less of volume than a giant double-bass, it was a full, pleasant baritone, reminding you of the hautboy among musical instruments, sweet and resonant, deep and rich.

M. de Valois had discarded the absurd costume still worn by a few antiquated Royalists, and frankly modernized his

dress. He always appeared in a maroon coat with gilt buttons, loosely-fitting breeches with gold buckles at the knees, a white sprigged vest, a tight stock, and a collarless shirt; this being a last vestige of eighteenth-century costume, which its wearer was the less willing to relinquish because it enabled him to display a throat not unworthy of a lay abbé. Square gold buckles of a kind unknown to the present generation shone conspicuous upon his patent-leather shoes. Two watch chains hung in view in parallel lines from a couple of fobs, another survival of an eighteenth-century mode which the old boy did not disdain to copy in the time of the Directory. This costume of a transition period, reuniting two centuries, was worn by the chevalier with the grace of an old-world marquis, a grace lost to the French stage since Molé's last pupil, Fleury, retired from the boards and took his secret with him.

The old bachelor's private life, seemingly open to all eyes, was in reality inscrutable. He lived in a modest lodging (to say the least of it) up two sets of stairs in a house in the Rue du Cours, his landlady being the laundress most in request in Alençon—which fact explains the extreme elegance of the chevalier's linen. Ill luck was so to order it that Alençon one day could actually believe that he had not always conducted himself as befitted a man of his quality, and that in his old age he privately married one Césarine, the mother of an infant which had the impertinence to come without being called.

"He gave his hand to her who for so long had lent her hand to iron his linen," said a certain M. du Bousquier.

The sensitive noble's last days were the more vexed by this unpleasant scandal, because, as shall be shown in the course of this present Scene, he had already lost a long-cherished hope for which he had made many a sacrifice.

Mme. Lardot's two rooms were let to M. le Chevalier de Valois at the moderate rent of a hundred francs per annum.

The worthy gentleman dined out every night, and only came home to sleep; he was therefore at charges for nothing but his breakfast, which always consisted of a cup of chocolate with butter and fruit, according to the season. A fire was never lighted in his rooms except in the very coldest winters, and then only while he was dressing. Between the hours of eleven and four M. de Valois took his walks abroad, read the newspapers, and paid calls.

When the chevalier first settled in Alençon, he magnanimously owned that he had nothing but an annuity of six hundred livres paid in quarterly installments by his old man of business, with whom the certificates were deposited. This was all that remained of his former wealth. And every three months, in fact, a banker in the town paid him a hundred and fifty francs remitted by one M. Bordin of Paris, the last of the *procureurs du Châtelet*.* These particulars everybody knew, for the chevalier had taken care to ask his confidant to keep the matter a profound secret. He reaped the fruits of his misfortunes. A cover was laid for him in all the best houses in Alençon; he was asked to every evening party. His talents as a card-player, a teller of anecdotes, a pleasant and well-bred man of the world were so thoroughly appreciated that an evening was spoiled if the connoisseur of the town was not present. The host and hostess and all the ladies present missed his little approving grimace. "You are adorably well dressed," from the old bachelor's lips, was sweeter to a young woman in a ballroom than the sight of her rival's despair.

There were certain old-world expressions which no one could pronounce so well. "My heart," "my jewel," "my little love," "my queen," and all the dear diminutives of the year 1770 took an irresistible charm from M. de Valois' lips; in short, the privilege of superlatives was his. His compliments, of which, moreover, he was chary, won him the good-

* Fiduciary agent.

will of the elderly ladies ; he flattered every one down to the officials of whom he had no need.

He was so fine a gentleman at the card-table that his behavior would have marked him out anywhere. He never complained ; when his opponents lost he praised their play ; he never undertook the education of his partners by showing them what they ought to have done. If a nauseating discussion of this kind began while the cards were making, the chevalier brought out his snuff-box with a gesture worthy of Molé, looked at the Princess Goritza's portrait, took off the lid in a stately manner, heaped up a pinch, rubbed it to a fine powder between finger and thumb, blew off the light particles, shaped a little cone in his hand, and by the time the cards were dealt he had replenished the cavities in his nostrils and replaced the princess in his waistcoat pocket—always on the left-hand side.

None but a noble of the Gracious as distinguished from the Great Century could have invented such a compromise between a disdainful silence and an epigram which would have passed over the heads of his company. The chevalier took dull minds as he found them, and knew how to turn them to account. His irresistible evenness of temper caused many a one to say : "I admire the Chevalier de Valois !" Everything about him, his conversation and his manner, seemed in keeping with his mild appearance. He was careful to come into collision with no one, man or woman. Indulgent with deformity as with defects of intellect, he listened patiently (with the help of the Princess Goritza) to tales of the little woes of life in a country town ; to anecdotes of the under-cooked egg at breakfast, or the sour cream in the coffee ; to small grotesque details of physical ailments ; to tales of dreams and visitations and wakings with a start. The chevalier was an exquisite listener. He had a languishing glance, a stock attitude to denote compassion ; he put in his "Ohs" and "Poohs" and "What-did-you-dos?" with

charming appropriateness. Till his dying day no one ever suspected that while these avalanches of nonsense lasted, the chevalier in his own mind was rehearsing the warmest passages of an old romance, of which the Princess Goritzza was the heroine. Has any one ever given a thought to the social uses of extinct sentiment?—or guessed in how many indirect ways love benefits humanity?

Possibly this listener's faculty sufficiently explains the chevalier's popularity; he was always the spoiled child of the town, although he never quitted a drawing-room without carrying off about five livres in his pocket. Sometimes he lost, and he made the most of his losses, but it very seldom happened. All those who knew him say with one accord that never in any place have they met with so agreeable a mummy, not even in the Egyptian museum at Turin. Surely in no known country of the globe did parasite appear in such a benignant shape. Never did selfishness in its most concentrated form show itself so inoffensive, so full of good offices, as in this gentleman; the chevalier's egoism was as good as another man's devoted friendship. If any person went to ask M. de Valois to do some trifling service which the worthy chevalier could not perform without inconvenience, that person never went away without conceiving a great liking for him, and departed fully convinced that the chevalier could do nothing in the matter, or might do harm if he meddled with it.

To explain this problematical existence the chronicler is bound to admit, while Truth—that ruthless debauchee—has caught him by the throat, that latterly, after the three sad, glorious Days of July, Alençon discovered that M. de Valois' winnings at cards amounted to something like a hundred and fifty crowns every quarter, which amount the ingenious chevalier intrepidly remitted to himself as an annuity, so that he might not appear to be without resources in a country with a great turn for practical details. Plenty of his friends—he was

dead by that time, please to remark—plenty of his friends denied this *in toto*; they maintained that the stories were fables and slanders set in circulation by the Liberal party, and that M. de Valois was an honorable and worthy gentleman. Luckily for clever gamblers, there will always be champions of this sort for them among the onlookers. Feeling ashamed to excuse wrongdoing, they stoutly deny that wrong has been done. Do not accuse them of wrong-headedness; they have their own sense of self-respect, and the Government sets them an example of the virtue which consists in burying its dead by night without chanting a *Te Deum* over a defeat. And suppose that M. de Valois permitted himself a neat stratagem that would have won Gramont's esteem, a smile from Baron de Fœneste, and a shake of the hand from the Marquis de Moncade, was he any the less the pleasant dinner guest, the wit, the unvarying card-player, the charming retailer of anecdotes, the delight of Alençon? In what, moreover, does the action, lying, as it does, outside the laws of right and wrong, offend against the elegant code of a man of birth and breeding? When so many people are obliged to give pensions to others, what more natural than of one's own accord to allow an annuity to one's own best friend? But Læius is dead.

After some fifteen years of this kind of life, the chevalier had amassed ten thousand and some odd hundred francs. When the Bourbons returned, he said that an old friend of his, M. le Marquis de Pombreton, late a lieutenant in the Black Musketeers, had returned a loan of twelve hundred pistoles with which he emigrated. The incident made a sensation. It was quoted afterward as a set-off against droll stories in the "*Constitutionnel*" of the ways in which some *émigrés* paid their debts. The poor chevalier used to blush all over the right side of his face whenever this noble trait in the Marquis de Pombreton came up in conversation. At the time every one rejoiced with M. de Valois; he used to consult capitalists as to the best way of investing this wreck of

his former fortune; and, putting faith in the Restoration, invested it all in Government stock when the Funds had fallen to fifty-six francs twenty-five centimes. MM. de Lenoncourt, de Navarreins, de Verneuil, de Fontaine, and La Billardière, to whom he was known, had obtained a pension of a hundred crowns for him from the privy purse, he said, and the cross of St. Louis. By what means the old chevalier obtained the two solemn confirmations of his title and quality, no one ever knew; but this much is certain, the cross of St. Louis gave him brevet rank as a colonel on a retiring pension, by reason of his services with the Catholic army in the West.

Beside the fiction of the annuity, to which no one gave a thought, the chevalier was now actually possessed of a genuine income of a thousand francs. But with this improvement in his circumstances he made no change in his life or manners; only—the red ribbon looked wondrous well on his maroon coat; it was a finishing touch, as it were, to this portrait of a gentleman. Ever since the year 1802 the chevalier had sealed his letters with an ancient gold seal, engraved roughly enough, but not so badly but that the Castérans, d'Esgrignons, and Troisvilles might see that he bore the arms of France impaled with his own, to wit, *France per pale, gules two bars gemelles, a cross of five mascles conjoined or, on a chief sable a cross pattee argent over all*; with a knight's casquet for crest and the motto—VALEO. With these noble arms the so-called bastard Valois was entitled to ride in all the royal coaches in the world.

Plenty of people envied the old bachelor his easy life, made up of boston, trictrac, reversis, whist, and piquet; of good play, dinners well digested, pinches of snuff gracefully taken, and quiet walks abroad. Almost all Alençon thought that his existence was empty alike of ambitions and cares; but where is the man whose life is quite as simple as they suppose who envy him?

In the remotest country village you shall find human mol-

luscs, rotifers inanimate to all appearance, which cherish a passion for lepidoptera or conchology, and are at infinite pains to acquire some new butterfly, or a specimen of *Concha Veneris*. And the chevalier had not merely shells and butterflies of his own, he cherished an ambitious desire with a pertinacity and profound strategy worthy of a Sixtus V. He meant to marry a rich old maid ; in all probability because a wealthy marriage would be a stepping-stone to the high spheres of the Court. *This* was the secret of his royal bearing and prolonged abode in Alençon.

Very early one Tuesday morning in the middle of spring in the year '16 (to use his own expression), the chevalier was just slipping on his dressing-gown, an old-fashioned green silk damask of a flowered pattern, when, in spite of the cotton in his ears, he heard a girl's light footstep on the stairs. In another moment some one tapped discreetly three times on the door, and then, without waiting for an answer, a very handsome damsel slipped like a snake into the old bachelor's apartment.

"Ah, Suzanne, is that you?" said the Chevalier de Valois, continuing to strop his razor. "What are you here for, dear little jewel of mischief?"

"I have come to tell you something which perhaps will give you as much pleasure as annoyance."

"Is it something about Césarine?"

"Much I trouble myself about your Césarine," pouted she, half careless, half in earnest.

The charming Suzanne, whose escapade was to exercise so great an influence on the lives of all the principal characters in this story, was one of Mme. Lardot's laundry girls. And now for a few topographical details:

The whole first floor of the house was given up to the laundry. The little yard was a drying ground where embroidered handkerchiefs, collarettes, lawn slips, cuffs, frilled shirts, cravats, laces, embroidered petticoats, all the fine wash-

ing of the best houses in the town, in short, hung out along the lines of hair rope. The chevalier used to say that he was kept informed of the progress of the receiver-general's wife's flirtations by the number of slips thus brought to light; and the amount of frilled shirts and cambric cravats varied directly with the petticoats and collarettes. By this system of double entry, as it were, he detected all the assignations in the town; but the chevalier was always discreet, he never let fall an epigram that might have closed a house to him. And yet he was a witty talker! For which reason you may be sure that M. de Valois' manners were of the finest, while his talents, as so often happens, were thrown away upon a narrow circle. Still, for he was only human after all, he sometimes could not resist the pleasure of a searching side-glance which made women tremble, and nevertheless they liked him when they found out how profoundly discreet he was, how full of sympathy for their pretty frailties.

Mme. Lardot's forewoman and factotum, an alarmingly ugly spinster of five-and-forty, occupied the rest of the third floor with the chevalier. Her door on the landing was exactly opposite his; and her apartments, like his own, consisted of two rooms, looking respectively upon the street and the yard. Above, there was nothing but the attics where the linen was dried in winter. Below lodged Mme. Lardot's grandfather. The old man, Grévin by name, had been a privateer in his time, and had served under Admiral Simeuse in the Indies; now he was paralyzed and stone deaf. Mme. Lardot herself occupied the rooms beneath her forewoman, and so great was her weakness for people of condition that she might be said to be blind where the chevalier was concerned. In her eyes, M. de Valois was an absolute monarch, a king that could do no wrong; even if one of her own work-girls had been said to be guilty of finding favor in his sight, she would have said, "He is so amiable!"

And so, if M. de Valois, like most people in the provinces,

lived in a glass house, it was secret as a robber's cave so far as he at least was concerned. A born confidant of the little intrigues of the laundry, he never passed the door—which always stood ajar—without bringing something for his pets—chocolate, bonbons, ribbons, laces, a gilt cross, and the jokes that grisettes love. Wherefore the little girls adored the chevalier. Women can tell by instinct whether a man is attracted to anything that wears a petticoat; they know at once the kind of man who enjoys the mere sense of their presence, who never thinks of making blundering demands of repayment for his gallantry. In this respect womankind has a canine faculty; a dog in any company goes straight to the man who respects animals. The Chevalier de Valois in his poverty preserved something of his former life; he was as unable to live without some fair one under his protection as any great lord of a bygone age. He clung to the traditions of the *petite maison*.* He loved to give to women, and women alone can receive gracefully, perhaps because it is always in their power to repay.

In these days, when every lad on leaving school tries his hand at unearthing symbols or sifting legends, is it not extraordinary that no one has explained that portent, the Courtesan of the Eighteenth Century. What was she but the tournament of the Sixteenth in another shape? In 1550 the knights displayed their prowess for their ladies; in 1750 they displayed their mistresses at Longchamps; to-day they run their horses over the course. The noble of every age has done his best to invent a life which he, and he only, can live. The pointed shoes of the Fourteenth Century are the red heels of the Eighteenth; the parade of a mistress was one fashion in ostentation; the sentiment of chivalry and the knight-errant was another.

The Chevalier de Valois could no longer ruin himself for a mistress, so for bonbons wrapped in bank-bills he politely offered a bag of genuine cracknels; and to the credit of

* Little house: place of a mistress' installment.

Alençon, be it said, the cracknels caused far more pleasure to the recipients than M. d'Artois' presents of carriages or silver-gilt toilet sets ever gave to the fair Duthé. There was not a girl in the laundry but recognized the chevalier's fallen greatness, and kept his familiarities in the house a profound secret.

In answer to questions, they always spoke gravely of the Chevalier de Valois ; they watched over him. For others he became a venerable gentleman, his life was a flower of sanctity. But at home they would have lighted on his shoulders like paroquets.

The chevalier liked to know the intimate aspects of family life which laundresses learn ; they used to go up to his room of a morning to retail the gossip of the town ; he called them his "gazettes in petticoats," his "living feuilletons." M. Sartine himself had not such intelligent spies at so cheap a rate, nor yet so loyal in their rascality. Remark, moreover, that the chevalier thoroughly enjoyed his breakfasts.

Suzanne was one of his favorites. A clever and ambitious girl with the stuff of a Sophie Arnould in her, she was beside as beautiful as the loveliest courtesan that Titian ever prayed to pose against a background of dark velvet as a model for his Venus. Her forehead and all the upper part of her face about the eyes were delicately moulded ; but the contours of the lower half were cast in a commoner mould. Hers was the beauty of a Norman, fresh, plump, and brilliant-complexioned, with that Rubens fleshiness which should be combined with the muscular development of the Farnese Hercules. This was no Venus dei Me ici, the graceful feminine counterpart of Apollo.

"Well, child," said the chevalier, "tell me your adventures little or big."

The chevalier's fatherly benignity with these grisettes would have marked him out anywhere between Paris and Pekin. The girls put him in mind of the courtesans of another age, of the illustrious queens of opera of European fame during a good

third of the eighteenth century. Certain it is that he who had lived for so long in a world of women now as dead and forgotten as the jesuits, the buccaneers, the abbés, and the farmers-general, and all great things generally—certain it is that the chevalier had acquired an irresistible good-humor, a gracious ease, an unconcern, with no trace of egoism discernible in it. So might Jupiter have appeared to Alcmena—a king that chooses to be a woman's dupe, and flings majesty and its thunderbolts to the winds, that he may squander Olympus in follies, and "little suppers," and feminine extravagance; wishful, of all things, to be far enough away from Juno.

The room in which the chevalier received company was bare enough, with its shabby bit of tapestry to do duty as a carpet, and very dirty, old-fashioned easy-chairs; the walls were covered with a cheap paper, on which the countenances of Louis XVI. and his family, framed in weeping willow, appeared at intervals among funeral urns, bearing the *sublime testament* by way of inscription, amid a whole host of sentimental emblems invented by royalism under the Terror; but in spite of all this, in spite of the old, flowered green silk dressing-gown, in spite of its owner's air of dilapidation, a certain fragrance of the eighteenth century clung about the Chevalier de Valois as he shaved himself before the old-fashioned toilet glass, covered with cheap lace. All the graceless graces of his youth seemed to reappear; he might have had three hundred thousand francs' worth of debts to his name and a chariot at his door. He looked a great man, great as Berthier in the Retreat from Moscow issuing the order of the day to battalions which were no more.

"Monsieur le Chevalier," Suzanne replied archly, "it seems to me that I have nothing to tell you—you have only to look!"

So saying, she turned and stood sideways to prove her words by ocular demonstration; and the chevalier, deep old

gentleman, still holding his razor across his chin, cast his right eye downward upon the damsel, and pretended to understand.

"Very good, my little pet, we will have a little talk together presently. But you come first, it seems to me."

"But, Monsieur le Chevalier, am I to wait till my mother beats me and Madame Lardot turns me away? If I do not go to Paris at once, I shall never get married here, where the men are so ridiculous."

"These things cannot be helped, child! Society changes, and women suffer just as much as the nobles from the shocking confusion which ensues. Topsy-turvydom in politics ends in topsy-turvy manners. Alas! woman soon will cease to be woman" (here he took the cotton-wool out of his ears to continue his toilet). "Women will lose a great deal by plunging into sentiment; they will torture their nerves, and there will be an end of the good old ways of our time, when a little pleasure was desired without blushes, and accepted without more ado, and the vapors" (he polished the earrings with the negroes' heads)—"the vapors were only known as a means of getting one's way; before long they will take the proportions of a complaint only to be cured by an infusion of orange-blossoms." (The chevalier burst out laughing.) "Marriage, in short," he resumed, taking a pair of tweezers to pluck out a gray hair, "marriage will come to be a very dull institution indeed, and it was so joyous in my time. The reign of Louis Quatorze and Louis Quinze (bear this in mind, my child) saw the last of the finest manners in the world."

"But, Monsieur le Chevalier," urged the girl, "it is your little Suzanne's character and reputation that is at stake, and you are not going to forsake her, I hope!"

"What is all this?" cried the chevalier, with a finishing touch to his hair; "I would sooner lose my name!"

"Ah!" said Suzanne.

"Listen to me, little masquerader." He sat down in a large, low chair, a *duchesse*, as it used to be called, which Mme. Lardot had picked up somewhere for her lodger. Then he drew the magnificent Suzanne to him till she stood between his knees; and Suzanne submitted—Suzanne who held her head so high in the streets, and had refused a score of overtures from admirers in Alençon, not so much from self-respect as in disdain of their pettiness. Suzanne so brazenly made the most of the supposed consequences of her errors that the old sinner, who had fathomed so many mysteries in persons far more astute than Suzanne, saw the real state of affairs at once. He knew well enough that a grisette does not laugh when disgrace is really in question, but he scorned to throw down the scaffolding of an engaging fib with a touch.

"We are slandering ourselves," said he, and there was an inimitable subtlety in his smile. "We are as well conducted as the fair one whose name we bear; we can marry without fear. But we do not want to vegetate here; we long for Paris, where charming creatures can be rich if they are clever, and we are not a fool. So we should like to find out whether the City of Pleasure has young Chevaliers de Valois in store for us, and a carriage and diamonds and an opera box. There are Russians and English and Austrians that are bringing millions to spend in Paris, and some of that money mamma settled on us as a marriage-portion when she gave us our good looks. And beside, we are patriotic; we should like to help France to find her own money in these gentlemen's pockets. Eh! eh! my dear little devil's lamb, all this is not bad. The neighbors will cry out upon you a little at first, perhaps, but success will make everything right. The real crime, my child, is poverty; and you and I both suffer for it. As we are not lacking in intelligence, we thought we might turn our dear little reputation to account to take in an old bachelor, but the old bachelor, sweetheart, knows the alpha and omega of

woman's wiles ; which is to say, that you would find it easier to put a grain of salt upon a sparrow's tail than to persuade me, the Chevalier de Valois, to believe that I have had any share in your affair.

"Go to Paris, my child, go at the expense of a bachelor's vanity ; I am not going to hinder you, I will help you, for the old bachelor, Suzanne, is the cash-box provided by nature for a young girl. But do not thrust me into the affair. Now, listen, my queen, understanding life so well as you do—you see, you might do me a good deal of harm and give me trouble ; harm, because you might spoil my marriage in a place where people are so particular ; trouble on your account, because you will get yourself in a scrape for nothing, a scrape entirely of your own invention, sly girl ; and you know, my pet, that I have no money left, I am as poor as a church mouse. Ah ! if I were to marry Mademoiselle Cormon, if I were rich again, I would certainly rather have you than Césarine. You were always fine gold enough to gild lead, it seemed to me ; you were made to be a great lord's love ; and as I knew you were a clever girl, I am not at all surprised by this trick of yours, I expected as much. For a girl, this means that you burn your boats. It is no common mind, my angel, that can do it ; and for that reason you have my esteem," and he bestowed confirmation upon her cheek after the manner of a bishop, with two fingers.

"But, Monsieur le Chevalier, I do assure you that you are mistaken, and——" she blushed, and dared not finish her sentence, at a glance he had seen through her, and read her plans from beginning to end.

"Yes, I understand, you wish me to believe you. Very well, I believe. But take my advice and go to Monsieur du Bousquier. You have taken Monsieur du Bousquier's linen home from the wash for five or six months, have you not ? Very good. I do not ask to know what has happened between you ; but I know *him*, he is vain, he is an old bachelor, he is

very rich, he has an income of two thousand five hundred lièvres, and spends less than eight hundred. If you are the clever girl that I take you for, you will find your way to Paris at his expense. Go to him, my pet, twist him round your fingers, and of all things be supple as silk, and make a double twist and a knot at every word; he is just the man to be afraid of a scandal; and if he knows that you can make him sit on the stool of repentance—— In short, you understand, threaten to apply to the ladies of the charitable fund. He is ambitious beside. Well and good, with a wife to help him there should be nothing beyond a man's reach; and are you not handsome enough and clever enough to make your husband's fortune? Why, plague take it, you might hold your own with a court lady."

The chevalier's last words let the light into Suzanne's brain; she was burning with impatience to rush off to du Bousquier; but as she could not hurry away too abruptly, she helped the chevalier to dress, asking questions about Paris as she did so. As for the chevalier, he saw that his remarks had taken effect, and gave Suzanne an excuse to go, asking her to tell Césarine to bring up the chocolate that Mme. Lardot made for him every morning, and Suzanne forthwith slipped off in search of her prey.

And here follows du Bousquier's biography. He came of an old Alençon family in a middle rank between the burghers and the country squires. On the death of his father, a magistrate in the criminal court, he was left without resource, and, like most ruined provincials, betook himself to Paris to seek his fortune. When the Revolution broke out, du Bousquier was a man of affairs; and in those days (in spite of the Republicans, who are all up in arms for the honesty of their government) the word "affairs" was used very loosely. Political spies, jobbers, and contractors, the men who arranged with the syndics of communes for the sale of the property of *émigrés*, and then brought up land at low prices to sell again

—all these people, like ministers and generals, were men of affairs.

From 1793 to 1799 du Bousquier held contracts to supply the army with forage and provisions. During those years he lived in a splendid mansion; he was one of the great capitalists of the time; he went shares with Ouvrard; kept open house and led the scandalous life of the times. A Cincinnatus, reaping where he had not sowed, and rich with stolen rations and sacks of corn, he kept *petites maisons* and a bevy of mistresses, and gave fine entertainments to the directors of the Republic. Citizen du Bousquier was one of Barras' intimates; he was on the best of terms with Fouché, and hand and glove with Bernadotte. He thought to be a minister of State one day, and threw himself heart and soul into the party that secretly plotted against Bonaparte before the battle of Marengo. And but for Kellermann's charge and the death of Desaix, du Bousquier would have played a great part in the State. He was one of the upper members of the permanent staff of the promiscuous government which was driven by Napoleon's luck to vanish into the side-scenes of 1793.*

The victory unexpectedly won by stubborn fighting ended in the downfall of this party; they had placards ready printed, and were only waiting for the First Consul's defeat to proclaim a return to the principles of the Mountain.

Du Bousquier, feeling convinced that a victory was impossible, had two special messengers on the battlefield, and speculated with the larger part of his fortune for a fall in the Funds. The first courier came with the news that Mélas was victorious; but the second arriving four hours afterward, at night, brought the tidings of the Austrian defeat. Du Bousquier cursed Kellermann and Desaix; the First Consul owed him millions, he dared not curse him. But between the chance of making millions on the one hand, and stark ruin on the other, he lost his head. For several days he was half idiotic; he had under-

* See "A Historical Mystery."

mined his constitution with excesses to such an extent that the thunderbolt left him helpless. He had something to hope from the settlement of his claims upon the Government ; but in spite of bribes, he was made to feel the weight of Napoleon's displeasure against army contractors who speculated on his defeat. M. de Fermon, so pleasantly nicknamed "*Fermons la caisse*," left du Bousquier without a penny. The First Consul was even more incensed by the immorality of his private life and his connection with Barras and Bernadotte than by his speculations on the Bourse ; he erased M. du Bousquier's name from the list of receivers-general, on which a last remnant of credit had placed him for Alençon.

Of all his former wealth, nothing now remained to du Bousquier save an income of twelve hundred francs from the Funds, an investment entirely due to chance, which saved him from actual want. His creditors, knowing nothing of the results of his liquidation, only left him enough in consols to bring in a thousand francs per annum ; but their claims were paid in full after all, when the outstanding debts had been collected, and the Hôtel de Beauséant, du Bousquier's town house, sold beside. So, after a close shave of bankruptcy, the sometime speculator emerged with his name intact. Preceded by a tremendous reputation due to his relations with former heads of government departments, his manner of life, his brief day of authority, and final ruin through the First Consul, the man interested the city Alençon, where Royalism was secretly predominant. Du Bousquier, exasperated against Bonaparte, with his tales of the First Consul's pettiness, of Josephine's lax morals, and a whole store of anecdotes of ten years of revolution, seen from within, met with a good reception.

It was about this period of his life that du Bousquier, now well over his fortieth year, came out as a bachelor of thirty-six. He was of medium height, fat as became a contractor, and willing to display a pair of calves that would have done

credit to a gay and gallant attorney. He had strongly marked features; a flattened nose with tufts of hair in the equine nostrils; bushy black brows, and eyes beneath them that looked out shrewd as M. de Talleyrand's own, though they had lost something of their brightness. He wore his brown hair very long, and retained the side-whiskers (*nageoires*, as they were called) of the time of the Republic. You had only to look at his fingers, tufted at every joint, or at the blue knotted veins that stood out upon his hands, to see the unmistakable signs of a very remarkable muscular development; and, in truth, he had the chest of the Farnese Hercules, and shoulders fit to bear the burden of the national debt; you never see such shoulders nowadays. His was a luxuriant virility admirably described by an eighteenth-century phrase which is scarcely intelligible to-day; the gallantry of a by-gone age would have summed up du Bousquier as a "payer of arrears"—*un vrai payeur d'arrérages*.

Yet, as in the case of the Chevalier de Valois, there were sundry indications at variance with the ex-contractor's general appearance. His vocal powers, for instance, were not in keeping with his muscles; not that it was the mere thread of a voice which sometimes issues from the throats of such two-footed seals; on the contrary, it was loud but husky, something like the sound of a saw cutting through damp, soft wood; it was, in fact, the voice of a speculator brought to grief. For a long while du Bousquier wore the costume in vogue in the days of his glory: the boots with turned-down tops, the white silk stockings, the short cloth breeches, ribbed with cinnamon color, the blue coat, the Robespierre vest.

His hatred of the First Consul should have been a sort of passport into the best Royalist houses of Alençon; but the seven or eight families that made up the local Faubourg Saint-Germain, into which the Chevalier de Valois had the entrance, held aloof. Almost from the first, du Bousquier had

aspired to marry one Mlle. Armande, whose brother was one of the most esteemed nobles of the town ; he thought to make this brother play a great part in his own schemes, for he was dreaming of a brilliant return match in politics. He met with a refusal, for which he consoled himself with such compensation as he might find among some half-score of retired manufacturers of Point d'Alençon lace, owners of grass lands or cattle, or wholesale linen merchants, thinking that among these chance might put a good match in his way. Indeed, the old bachelor had centred all his hopes on a prospective fortunate marriage, which a man, eligible in so many ways, might fairly expect to make. For he was not without a certain financial acumen, of which not a few availed themselves. He pointed out business speculations as a ruined gambler gives hints to new hands ; and he was expert at discovering the resources, chances, and management of a concern. People looked upon him as a good administrator. It was an often-discussed question whether he should not be mayor of Alençon, but the recollection of his Republican jobberies spoiled his chances, and he was never received at the prefecture.

Every successive government, even the government of the Hundred Days, declined to give him the coveted appointment, which would have assured his marriage with an elderly spinster whom he now had in his mind. It was his detestation of the Imperial Government that drove him into the Royalist camp, where he stayed in spite of insults there received ; but when the Bourbons returned, and still he was excluded from the prefecture, that final rebuff filled him with a hatred deep as the profound secrecy in which he wrapped it. Outwardly, he remained patiently faithful to his opinions ; secretly, he became the leader of the Liberal party in Alençon, the invisible controller of elections ; and, by his cunningly devised manoeuvres and underhand methods, he worked no little harm to the restored Monarchy.

When a man is reduced to live through his intellect alone,

his hatred is something as quiet as a little stream ; insignificant to all appearance, but unfailing. This was the case with du Bousquier. His hatred was like a negro's, so placid, so patient, that it deceives the enemy. For fifteen years he brooded over a revenge which no victory, not even the Three Days of July, 1830, could sate.

When the chevalier sent Suzanne to du Bousquier, he had his own reasons for so doing. The Liberal and the Royalist divined each other, in spite of the skillful dissimulation which hid their common aim from the rest of the town.

The two old bachelors were rivals. Both of them had planned to marry the Demoiselle Cormon, whose name came up in the course of the chevalier's conversation with Suzanne. Both of them, engrossed by their idea and masquerading in indifference, were waiting for the moment when some chance should deliver the old maid to one or other of them. And the fact that they were rivals in this way would have been enough to make enemies of the pair even if each had not been the living embodiment of a political system.

Men take their color from their time. This pair of rivals is a case in point ; the historic tinge of their characters stood out in strong contrast in their talk, their ideas, their costume. The one, blunt and energetic, with his burly abrupt ways, curt speech, dark looks, dark hair, and dark complexion, alarming in appearance, but impotent in reality as insurrection, was the Republic personified ; the other, bland and polished, elegant and fastidious, gaining his ends slowly but surely by diplomacy, and never unmindful of good taste, was the typical old-world courtier. They met on the same ground almost every evening. It was a rivalry always courteous and urbane on the part of the chevalier, less ceremonious on du Bousquier's, though he kept within the limits prescribed by Alençon, for he had no wish to be driven ignominiously from the field. The two men understood each other well ; but no one else saw what was going on. In spite of the minute and

curious interest which provincials take in the small details of which their lives are made up, no one so much as suspected that the two men were rivals.

M. le Chevalier's position was somewhat the stronger; he had never proposed for Mlle. Cormon, whereas du Bousquier had declared himself after a rebuff from one of the noblest families, and had met with a second refusal. Still, the chevalier thought so well of his rival's chances that he considered it worth while to deal him a *coup de Jarnac*, a treacherous thrust from a weapon as finely tempered as Suzanne. He had fathomed du Bousquier; and, as will shortly be seen, he was not mistaken in any of his conjectures.

Suzanne tripped away down the Rue du Cours, along the Rue de la Porte de Sééz and the Rue du Bercail to the Rue du Cygne, where du Bousquier, five years ago, had bought a small countrified house built of the gray stone of the district, which is used like granite in Normandy, or Breton schist in the West. The sometime forage-contractor had established himself there in more comfort than any other house in the town could boast, for he had brought with him some relics of past days of splendor; but provincial manners and customs were slowly darkening the glory of the fallen Sardanapalus. The vestiges of past luxury looked about as much out of place in the house as a chandelier in a barn. Harmony, which links the works of man or of God together, was lacking in all things large or small. A ewer with a metal lid, such as you only see on the outskirts of Brittany, stood on a handsome nest of drawers; and while the bedroom floor was covered with a fine carpet, the window-curtains displayed a flower pattern only known to cheap, printed cottons. The stone mantel-piece, daubed over with paint, was out of all keeping with a handsome clock disgraced by a shabby pair of candlesticks. Local talent had made an unsuccessful attempt to paint the doors in vivid contrasts of startling colors; while the stair-

case, ascended by all and sundry in muddy boots, had not been painted at all. In short, du Bousquier's house, like the time which he represented, was a confused mixture of grandeur and squalor.

Du Bousquier was regarded as well-to-do, but he led the parasitical life of the Chevalier de Valois, and he is always rich enough that spends less than his income. His one servant was a country bumpkin, a dull-witted youth enough; but he had been trained, by slow degrees, to suit du Bousquier's requirements, until he had learned, much as an ourang-outang might learn, to scour floors, black boots, brush clothes, and to come for his master of an evening with a lantern if it was dark, and a pair of sabots if it rained. On great occasions, du Bousquier made him discard the blue-checked cotton blouse with loose sagging pockets behind, which always bulged with a handkerchief, a clasp knife, apples, or "stickjaw taffy." Arrayed in a regulation suit of clothes, he accompanied his master to wait at table, and overate himself afterward with the other servants. Like many other mortals, René had only stuff enough in him for one vice, and his was gluttony. Du Bousquier made a reward of this service, and in return his Breton factotum was absolutely discreet.

"What, have you come our way, miss?" René asked when he saw Suzanne in the doorway. "It is not your day; we have not got any linen for Madame Lardot."

"Big stupid!" laughed the fair Suzanne, as she went up the stairs, leaving René to finish a porringer full of buckwheat bannocks boiled in milk.

Du Bousquier was still in bed, ruminating his plans for fortune. To him, as to all who have squeezed the orange of pleasure, there was nothing left but ambition. Ambition, like gambling, is inexhaustible. And, moreover, given a good constitution, the passions of the brain will always outlive the heart's passions.

"Here I am!" said Suzanne, sitting down on the bed; the

curtain-rings grated along the rods as she swept them sharply back with an imperious gesture.

"*Quésaco*, my charmer?" asked du Bousquier, sitting upright.

"Monsieur," Suzanne began, with much gravity, "you must be surprised to see me come in this way; but, under the circumstances, it is no use my minding what people will say."

"What is all this about?" asked du Bousquier, folding his arms.

"Why, do you not understand?" returned Suzanne. "I know" (with an engaging little pout), "I know how ridiculous it is when a poor girl comes to bother a man about things that you think mere trifles. But if you really knew me, monsieur, if you only knew all that I would do for a man, if he cared about me as I could care about you, you would never repent of marrying me. It is not that I could be of so much use to you *here*, by the way; but if we went to Paris, you should see how far I could bring a man of spirit with such brains as yours, and especially just now, when they are re-making the Government from top to bottom, and the foreigners are the masters. Between ourselves, does this thing in question really matter after all? Is it not a piece of good fortune for which you would be glad to pay a good deal one of these days? For whom are you going to think and work?"

"For myself, to be sure!" du Bousquier answered most brutally.

"Old monster! you shall never be a father!" said Suzanne, with a ring in her voice which turned the words to a prophecy and a curse.

"Come, Suzanne, no nonsense; I am dreaming still, I think."

"What more do you want in the way of reality?" cried Suzanne, rising to her feet. Du Bousquier scrubbed his head with his cotton nightcap, which he twisted round and round

with a fidgety energy that told plainly of prodigious mental ferment.

"He actually believes it!" Suzanne said within herself. "And his vanity is tickled. Good Lord, how easy it is to take them in!"

"Suzanne! What the deuce do you want me to do? It is so extraordinary—— I that thought—— The fact is—— But no, no, it can't be——"

"Do you mean that you cannot marry me?"

"Oh, as to that, no. I am not free."

"Is it Mademoiselle Armande or Mademoiselle Cormon, who have both refused you already? Look here, Monsieur du Bousquier, it is not as if I was obliged to get gendarmes to drag you to the registrar's office to save my character. There are plenty that would marry me, but I have no intention whatever of taking a man that does not know my value. You may be sorry some of these days that you behaved like this; for if you will not take your chance to-day, not for gold, nor silver, nor anything in this world will I give it you again."

"But, Suzanne—are you sure——?"

"Sir, for what do you take me?" asked the girl, draping herself in her virtue. "I am not going to put you in mind of the promises you made, promises that have been the ruin of a poor girl, when all her fault was that she looked too high and loved too much."

But joy, suspicion, self-interest, and a host of contending emotions had taken possession of du Bousquier. For a long time past he had made up his mind that he would marry Mlle. Cormon; for, after long ruminations over the Charter, he saw that it opened up magnificent prospects to his ambition through the channels of a representative government. His marriage with that mature spinster would raise his social position very much; he would acquire a great influence in Alençon. And here this wily Suzanne had conjured up a storm, which put him in a most awkward dilemma. But for that private

hope of his, he would have married Suzanne out of hand, and put himself openly at the head of the Liberal party in the town. Such a marriage meant the final renunciation of the best society, and a drop into the ranks of the wealthy tradesmen, storekeepers, rich manufacturers, and graziers, who, beyond a doubt, would carry him as their candidate in triumph. Already du Bousquier caught a glimpse of the Opposition benches. He did not attempt to hide his solemn deliberations; he rubbed his hand over his head, made a wisp of the cotton nightcap, and a damaging confession of the nudity beneath it. As for Suzanne, after the wont of those who succeed beyond their utmost hopes, she sat dumfounded. To hide her amazement at his behavior, she drooped like a hapless victim before her seducer, while within herself she laughed like a grisette on a frolic.

"My dear child, I will have nothing to do with hanky-panky of this sort."

This brief formula was the result of his cogitations. The ex-contractor to the Government prided himself upon belonging to that particular school of cynic philosophers which declines to be "taken in" by women, and includes the whole sex in one category as suspicious characters. Strong-minded men of this stamp, weaklings are they for the most part, have a catechism of their own in the matter of woman-kind. Every woman, according to them, from the Queen of France to the milliner, is at heart a rake, a hussy, a dangerous creature, not to say a bit of a rascal, a liar in grain, a being incapable of a serious thought. For du Bousquier and his like, woman is a maleficent *bayadère** that must be left to dance, and sing, and laugh. They see nothing holy, nothing great in woman; for them she represents, not the poetry of the senses, but gross sensuality. They are like gluttons who mistake the kitchen for the dining-room. On this showing, a man must be a consistent tyrant, unless he means to be en-

* Indian dancing-girl.

slaved. And in this respect, again, du Bousquier and the Chevalier de Valois stood at opposite poles.

As he delivered himself of the above remark, he flung his nightcap to the foot of the bed, much as Gregory the Great might have flung down the candle while he launched the thunders of an excommunication; and Suzanne learned that the old bachelor wore a false front.

"Bear in mind, Monsieur du Bousquier, that by coming here I have done my duty," she remarked majestically. "Remember that I was bound to offer you my hand and to ask for yours; but, at the same time, remember that I have behaved with the dignity of a self-respecting woman; I did not lower myself so far as to cry like a fool; I did not insist; I have not worried you at all. Now you know my position. You know that I cannot stay in Alençon. If I do, my mother will beat me; and Madame Lardot is as high and mighty over principles as if she washed and ironed with them. She will turn me away. And where am I to go, poor workgirl that I am? To the hospital? Am I to beg for bread? Not I. I would sooner fling myself into the Brillante or the Sarthe. Now, would it not be simpler for me to go to Paris? Mother might find some excuse for sending me, an uncle wants me to come, or an aunt is going to die, or some lady takes an interest in me. It is just a question of money for the traveling expenses and—you know what——"

This news was immeasurably more important to du Bousquier than to the Chevalier de Valois, for reasons which no one knew as yet but the two rivals, though they will appear in the course of the story. At this point, suffice it to say that Suzanne's fib had thrown the sometime forage-contractor's ideas into such confusion that he was incapable of thinking seriously. But for that bewilderment, but for the secret joy in his heart (for a man's own vanity is a swindler that never lacks a dupe), it must have struck him that any honest girl, with a heart still unspoiled, would have died a hundred deaths

rather than enter upon such a discussion, or make a demand for money. He must have seen the look in the girl's eyes, seen the gambler's ruthless meanness that would take a life to gain money for a stake.

"Would you really go to Paris?" he asked.

The words brought a twinkle to Suzanne's gray eyes, but it was lost upon du Bousquier's self-satisfaction.

"I would indeed, sir."

But at this du Bousquier broke out into a singular lament. He had just paid the balance of the purchase-money for his house; and there was the painter, and the glazier, and the bricklayer, and the carpenter. Suzanne let him talk; she was waiting for the figures. Du Bousquier at last proposed three hundred francs, and at this Suzanne, with an assumption of dignity, got up as if to go.

"Eh, what! Where are you going?" du Bousquier cried uneasily. "A fine thing to be a bachelor," he said to himself. "I'll be hanged if I remember doing more than rumple the girl's collar; and hey presto! on the strength of a joke she takes upon herself to draw a bill upon you, point-blank!"

Suzanne meanwhile began to cry. "Monsieur," she said, "I am going to Madame Granson, the treasurer of the Maternity Fund; she pulled one poor girl in the same strait out of the water (as you may say) to my knowledge."

"Madame Granson?"

"Yes. She is related to Mademoiselle Cormon, the lady patroness of the society. Asking your pardon, some ladies in the town have started a society that will keep many a poor creature from making away with her child, like that pretty Faustine of Argentan did; and paid for it with her life at Mortagne just three years ago."

"Here, Suzanne," returned du Bousquier, holding out a key, "open the desk yourself. There is a bag that has been opened, with six hundred francs still left in it. It is all I have."

Du Bousquier's chopfallen expression plainly showed how little good-will went with his compliance.

"An old thief!" said Suzanne to herself. "I will tell tales about his false hair!" Mentally she compared him with that delightful old Chevalier de Valois; he had given her nothing, but he understood her, he had advised her, he had the welfare of his grisettes at heart.

"If you are deceiving me, Suzanne," exclaimed the object of this unflattering comparison, as he watched her hand in the drawer, "you shall——"

"So, monsieur, you would not give me the money if I asked you for it?" interrupted she with queenly insolence.

Once recalled to the ground of gallantry, recollections of his prime came back to the ex-contractor. He grunted assent. Suzanne took the bag and departed, first submitting her forehead to a kiss which he gave, but in a manner which seemed to say, "This is an expensive privilege; but it is better than being brow-beaten by counsel in a court of law as the seducer of a young woman accused of child-murder."

Suzanne slipped the bag into a pouch-shaped basket on her arm, execrating du Bousquier's stinginess as she did so, for she wanted a thousand francs. If a girl is once possessed by a desire, and has taken the first step in trickery and deceit, she will go to great lengths. As the fair laundress took her way along the Rue de Bercaill, it suddenly occurred to her that the Maternity Fund under Mlle. Cormon's presidency would probably make up the sum which she regarded as sufficient for a start, a very large amount in the eyes of an Alençon grisette. And beside, she hated du Bousquier, and du Bousquier seemed frightened when she talked of confessing her so-called strait to Mme. Granson. Wherefore Suzanne determined that whether or not she made a centime out of the Maternity Fund, she would entangle du Bousquier in the inextricable undergrowth of the gossip of a country town. There is something of a monkey's love of mischief in every grisette. Suzanne com-

posed her countenance dolorously and betook herself accordingly to Madame Granson.

Mme. Granson was the widow of a lieutenant-colonel of artillery who fell at Jena. Her whole yearly income consisted of a pension of nine hundred francs for her lifetime, and her one possession beside was a son whose education and maintenance had absorbed every penny of her savings. She lived in the Rue du Bercail, in one of the cheerless first-floor apartments through which you can see from back to front at a glance as you walk down the main street of any little town. Three steps, rising pyramid fashion, brought you to the level of the house-door, which opened upon a passageway and a little yard beyond, with a wooden-roofed staircase at the farther end. Mme. Granson's kitchen and dining-room occupied the space on one side of the passage, on the other side a single room did duty for a variety of purposes, for the widow's bedroom among others. Her son, a young man of three-and-twenty, slept upstairs in an attic above the second floor. Athanase Granson contributed six hundred francs to the poor mother's housekeeping. He was distantly related to Mlle. Cormon, whose influence had obtained him a little post in the registrar's office, where he was employed in making out certificates of births, marriages, and deaths.

After this, any one can see the little chilly, yellow-curtained parlor, the furniture covered with yellow Utrecht velvet, and Mme. Granson going round the room, after her visitors had left, to straighten the little straw mats put down in front of each chair, so as to save the waxed and polished red brick floor from contact with dirty boots; and, this being accomplished, returning to her place beside her work-table under the portrait of her lieutenant-colonel. The becushioned arm-chair, in which she sat at her sewing, was always drawn up between the two windows, so that she could look up and down the Rue du Bercail and see every one that passed. She was a good sort of woman, dressed with a homely simplicity in keep-

ing with a pale face, beaten thin, as it were, by many cares. You felt the stern soberness of poverty in every little detail in that house, just as you breathed a moral atmosphere of austerity and upright provincial ways.

Mother and son at this moment were sitting together in the dining-room over their breakfast—a cup of coffee, bread and butter, and radishes. And here, if the reader is to understand how gladly Mme. Granson heard Suzanne, some explanation of the secret hopes of the household must be given.

Athanase Granson was a thin, hollow-cheeked young man of medium height, with a white face in which a pair of dark eyes, bright with thought, looked like two marks made with charcoal. The somewhat worn contours of that face, the curving line of the lips, a sharply turned-up chin, a regularly cut marble forehead, a melancholy expression caused by the consciousness of power on the one hand and of poverty on the other—all these signs and characteristics told of imprisoned genius. So much so, indeed, that anywhere but at Alençon his face would have won help for him from distinguished men, or from the women that can discern genius incognito. For if this was not genius, at least it was the outward form that genius takes; and if the strength of a high heart was wanting, it looked out surely from those eyes. And yet, while Athanase could find expression for the loftiest feeling, an outer husk of shyness spoiled everything in him, down to the very charm of youth, just as the frost of penury disheartened every effort. Shut in by the narrow circle of provincial life, without approbation, encouragement, or any way of escape, the thought within him was dying out before its dawn. And Athanase, beside, had the fierce pride which poverty intensifies in certain natures, the kind of pride by which a man grows great in the stress of battle with men and circumstance, while at the outset it only handicaps him.

Genius manifests itself in two ways—either by taking its own as soon as it finds it, like a Napoleon or a Molière, or by

patiently revealing itself and waiting for recognition. Young Granson belonged to the latter class. He was easily discouraged, ignorant of his value. His turn of mind was contemplative, he lived in thought rather than in action, and possibly, to those who cannot imagine genius without the Frenchman's spark of enthusiasm, he might have seemed incomplete. But Athanase's power lay in the world of thought. He was to pass through successive phases of emotion, hidden from ordinary eyes, to one of those sudden resolves which bring the chapter to a close and set fools declaring that "the man is mad." The world's contempt for poverty was sapping the life in Athanase. The bow, continually strung tighter and tighter, was slackened by the enervating close air of a solitude with never a breath of fresh air in it. He was giving way under the strain of a cruel and fruitless struggle. Athanase had that in him which might have placed his name among the foremost names of France; he had known what it was to gaze with glowing eyes over Alpine heights and fields of air whither unfettered genius soars, and now he was pining to death like some caged and starved eagle.

While he had worked on unnoticed in the town library, he buried his dreams of fame in his own soul lest they should injure his prospects; and he carried beside another secret hidden even more deeply in his heart, the secret love which hollowed his cheeks and sallowed his forehead.

Athanase loved his distant cousin, that Mlle. Cormon, for whom his unconscious rivals du Bousquier and the Chevalier de Valois were laying in ambush. It was a love born of self-interest. Mlle. Cormon was supposed to be one of the richest people in the town; and he, poor boy, had been drawn to love her partly through the desire for material welfare, partly through a wish formed times without number to gild his mother's declining years, and partly also through cravings for the physical comfort necessary to men who live an intellectual life. In his own eyes, his love was dishonored by its

very natural origin ; and he was afraid of the ridicule which people pour on the love of a young man of three-and-twenty for a woman of forty. And yet his love was quite sincere. Much that happens in the provinces would be improbable upon the face of it anywhere else, especially in matters of this kind.

But in a country town there are no unforeseen contingencies ; there is no coming and going, no mystery, no such thing as chance. Marriage is a necessity, and no family will accept a man of dissolute life. A connection between a young fellow like Athanase and a handsome girl might seem a natural thing enough in a great city ; in a country town it would be enough to ruin a young man's chances of marriage, especially if he were poor ; for when the prospective bridegroom is wealthy an awkward business of this sort may be smoothed over. Between the degradation of certain courses and a sincere love, a man that is not heartless can make but one choice if he happens to be poor ; he will prefer the disadvantages of virtue to the disadvantages of vice. But in a country town the number of women with whom a young man can fall in love is strictly limited. A pretty girl with a fortune is beyond his reach in a place where every one's income is known to a farthing. A penniless beauty is equally out of the question. To take her for a wife would be "to marry hunger and thirst," as the provincial saying goes. Finally, celibacy has its dangers in youth. These reflections explain how it has come to pass that marriage is the very basis of provincial life.

Men in whom genius is hot and unquenchable, who are forced to take their stand on the independence of poverty, ought to leave these cold regions ; in the provinces thought meets with the persecution of brutal indifference, and no woman cares, or dares, to play the part of a sister of charity to the worker, the lover of art or sciences.

Who can rightly understand Athanase's love for Mlle.

Cormon? Not the rich, the sultans of society, who can find seraglios at their pleasure; not respectability, keeping to the track beaten hard by prejudice; nor yet those women who shut their eyes to the cravings of the artist temperament, and, taking it for granted that both sexes are governed by the same laws, insist upon a system of reciprocity in their particular virtues. The appeal must, perhaps, be made to young men who suffer from the repression of young desires just as they are putting forth their full strength; to the artist whose genius is stifled within him by poverty till it becomes a disease; to power at first unsupported, persecuted, and too often unfriended till it emerges at length triumphant from the twofold agony of soul and body.

These will know the throbbing pangs of the cancer which was gnawing Athanase. Such as these have raised long, cruel debates within themselves, with the so high end in sight and no means of attaining it. They have passed through the experience of abortive effort; they have left the spawn of genius on the barren sands. They know that the strength of desire is as the scope of the imagination; the higher the leap, the lower the fall; and how many restraints are broken in such falls? These, like Athanase, catch glimpses of a glorious future in the distance; all that lies between seems but a transparent film of gauze to their piercing sight; but of that film which scarcely obscures the vision, society makes a wall of brass. Urged on by their vocation, by the artist's instinct within them, they too seek times without number to make a stepping-stone of sentiments which society turns in the same way to practical ends. What! when marriages in the provinces are calculated and arranged on every side with a view to securing material welfare, shall it be forbidden to a struggling artist or man of science to keep two ends in view, to try to insure his own subsistence that the thought within him may live?

Athanase Granson, with such ideas as these fermenting in

his head, thought at first of marriage with Mlle. Cormon as a definite solution of the problem of existence. He would be free to work for fame, he could make his mother comfortable, and he felt sure of himself—he knew that he could be faithful to Mlle. Cormon. But soon his purpose bred a real passion in him. It was an unconscious process. He set himself to study Mlle. Cormon; then familiarity exercised its spell, and at length Athanase saw nothing but beauties—the defects were all forgotten.

The senses count for so much in the love of a young man of three-and-twenty. Through the heat of desire woman is seen as through a prism. From this point of view it was a touch of genius in Beaumarchais to make the page Cherubino in the play strain Marcellina to his heart. If you recollect, moreover, that poverty restricted Athanase to a life of great loneliness, that there was no other woman to look at, that his eyes were always fastened upon Mlle. Cormon, and that all the light in the picture was concentrated upon her, it seems natural, does it not, that he should love her? The feeling hidden in the depths of his heart could but grow stronger day by day. Desire and pain and hope and meditation, in silence and repose, were filling up Athanase's soul to the brim; every hour added its drop. As his senses came to the aid of imagination and widened the inner horizon, Mlle. Cormon became more and more awe-inspiring, and he grew more and more timid.

The mother had guessed it all. She was a provincial, and she frankly calculated the advantages of the match. Mlle. Cormon might think herself very lucky to marry a young man of twenty-three with plenty of brains, a likely man to do honor to his name and country. Still the obstacles, Athanase's poverty and Mlle. Cormon's age, seemed to her to be insurmountable; there was nothing for it that she could see but patience. She had a policy of her own, like du Bousquier and the Chevalier de Valois; she was on the lookout for her

opportunity, waiting, with wits sharpened by self-interest and a mother's love, for the propitious moment.

Of the Chevalier de Valois, Mme. Granson had no suspicion whatsoever; du Bousquier she still credited with views upon the lady, albeit Mlle. Cormon had once refused him. An adroit and secret enemy, Mme. Granson did the ex-contractor untold harm to serve the son to whom she had not spoken a word. After this, who does not see the importance of Suzanne's lie once confided to Mme. Granson? What a weapon put into the hands of the charitable treasurer of the Maternity Fund! How demurely she would carry the tale from house to house when she asked for subscriptions for the chaste Suzanne!

At this particular moment Athanase was pensively sitting with his elbow on the table, balancing a spoon on the edge of the empty bowl before him. He looked with unseeing eyes round the poor room, over the walls covered with an old-fashioned paper only seen in wine-saloons, at the window-curtains with a chessboard pattern of pink-and-white squares, at the red-brick floor, the straw-bottomed chairs, the painted wooden sideboard, the glass door that opened into the kitchen. As he sat facing his mother and with his back to the fire, and as the fireplace was almost opposite the door, the first thing which caught Suzanne's eyes was his pale face, with the light from the street window falling full upon it, a face framed in dark hair, and eyes with the gleam of despair in them, and a fever kindled by the morning's thoughts.

The grisette surely knows by instinct the pain and sorrow of love; at the sight of Athanase, she felt that sudden electric thrill which comes we know not whence. We cannot explain it; some strong-minded persons deny that it exists, but many a woman and many a man has felt that shock of sympathy. It is a flash, lighting up the darkness of the future, and at the same time a presentiment of the pure joy of love shared by two souls, and a certainty that this other too understands. It

is more like the strong, sure touch of a master hand upon the clavier of the senses than anything else. Eyes are riveted by an irresistible fascination, hearts are troubled, the music of joy rings in the ears and thrills the soul; a voice cries, "It is he!" And then—then very likely, reflection throws a douche of cold water over all this turbulent emotion, and there is an end of it.

In a moment, swift as a clap of thunder, a broadside of new thoughts poured in upon Suzanne. A lightning flash of love burned the weeds which had sprung up in dissipation and wantonness. She saw all that she was losing by blighting her name with a lie, the desecration, the degradation of it. Only last evening this idea had been a joke, now it was like a heavy sentence passed upon her. She recoiled before her success. But, after all, it was quite impossible that anything should come of this meeting; and the thought of Athanase's poverty, and a vague hope of making money and coming back from Paris with both hands full, to say: "I loved you all along"—or fate, if you will have it so—dried up the beneficent dew. The ambitious damsel asked shyly to speak for a moment with Mme. Granson, who took her into her bedroom.

When Suzanne came out again she looked once more at Athanase. He was still sitting in the same attitude. She choked back her tears.

As for Mme. Granson, she was radiant. She had found a terrible weapon to use against du Bousquier at last; she could deal him a deadly blow. So she promised the poor victim of seduction the support of all the ladies who subscribed to the Maternity Fund. She foresaw a dozen calls in prospect. In the course of the morning and afternoon she would conjure down a terrific storm upon the elderly bachelor's head. The Chevalier de Valois certainly foresaw the turn that matters were likely to take, but he had not expected anything like the amount of scandal that came of it.

"We are going to dine with Mademoiselle Cormon, you

know, dear boy," said Mme. Granson; "take rather more pains with your appearance. It is a mistake to neglect your dress as you do; you look so untidy. Put on your best frilled shirt and your green cloth coat. I have my reasons," she added, with a mysterious air. "And beside, there will be a great many people; Mademoiselle Cormon is going to the Prébaudet directly. If a young man is thinking of marrying, he ought to make himself agreeable in every possible way. If girls would only tell the truth, my boy, dear me! you would be surprised at the things that take their fancy. It is often quite enough if a young man rides by at the head of a company of artillery, or comes to a dance in a suit of clothes that fits him passably well. A certain way of carrying the head, a melancholy attitude, is enough to set a girl imagining a whole life; we invent a romance to suit the hero; often he is only a stupid young man, but the marriage is made. Take notice of Monsieur de Valois, study him, copy his manners; see how he looks at ease; he has not a constrained manner, as you have. And talk a little; any one might think that you knew nothing at all, *you* that know Hebrew by heart."

Athanase heard her submissively, but he looked surprised. He rose, took his cap, and went back to his work.

"Can mother have guessed my secret?" he thought, as he went round by the Rue de Val-Noble where Mademoiselle Cormon lived, a little pleasure in which he indulged of a morning. His head was swarming with romantic fancies.

"How little she thinks that going past her house at this moment is a young man who would love her dearly, and be true to her, and never cause her a single care, and leave her fortune entirely in her own hands! Oh me! what a strange fatality it is that we two should live as we do in the same town and within a few paces of each other, and yet nothing can bring us any nearer! How if I spoke to her to-night?"

Meanwhile Suzanne went home to her mother, thinking the while of poor Athanase, feeling that for him she could find it

in her heart to do what many a woman must have longed to do for the one beloved with superhuman strength; she could have made a stepping-stone of her beautiful body if so he might come to his kingdom the sooner.

And now we must enter the house where all the actors in this Scene (Suzanne excepted) were to meet that very evening, the house belonging to the old maid, the converging point of so many interests. As for Suzanne, that young woman with her well-grown beauty, with courage sufficient to burn her boats, like Alexander, and to begin the battle of life with an uncalled-for sacrifice of her character, she now disappears from the stage after bringing about a violently exciting situation. Her wishes, moreover, were more than fulfilled. A few days afterward she left her native place with a stock of money and fine clothes, including a superb green rep gown and a green bonnet lined with rose color, M. de Valois' gifts, which Suzanne liked better than anything else, better even than the Maternity Society's money. If the chevalier had gone to Paris while Suzanne was in her heyday, she would assuredly have left all for him.

And so this chaste Susannah, of whom the elders scarcely had more than a glimpse, settled herself comfortably and hopefully in Paris, while all Alençon was deploring the misfortunes with which the ladies of the Charitable and Maternity Societies had manifested so lively a sympathy.

While Suzanne might be taken as a type of the handsome Norman virgins who furnish, on the showing of a learned physician, one-third of the supply devoured by the monster, Paris, she entered herself, and remained in those higher branches of her profession in which some regard is paid to appearances. In an age in which, as M. de Valois said, "woman has ceased to be woman," she was known merely as Mme. du Val-Noble; in other times she would have rivaled an Imperia, a Rhodope, a Ninon. One of the most distinguished writers of the Res-

toration took her under his protection, and very likely will marry her some day; he is a journalist, and above public opinion, seeing that he creates a new one every six years.

In almost every prefecture of the second magnitude there is some salon frequented not exactly by the cream of the local society, but by personages both considerable and well considered. The host and hostess probably will be among the foremost people in the town. To them all houses are open; no entertainment, no public dinner is given, but they are asked to it; but in their salon you will not meet the *gens à château*—lords of the manor, peers of France living on their broad acres, and persons of the highest quality in the department, though these are all on visiting terms with the family, and exchange invitations to dinners and evening parties. The mixed society to be found there usually consists of the lesser noblesse resident in the town, with the clergy and judicial authorities. It is an influential assemblage. All the wit and sense of the district is concentrated in its solid, unpretentious ranks. Everybody in the set knows the exact amount of his neighbor's income, and professes the utmost indifference to dress and luxury, trifles held to be mere childish vanity compared with the acquisition of a *mouchoir à bœufs*—a pocket-handkerchief of some ten or a dozen acres, purchased after as many years of pondering and intriguing and a prodigious deal of diplomacy.

Unshaken in its prejudices whether good or ill, the coterie goes on its way without a look before or behind. Nothing from Paris is allowed to pass without a prolonged scrutiny; innovations are ridiculous, and bonds and cashmere shawls alike objectionable. Provincials read nothing and wish to learn nothing; for them, science, literature, and mechanical invention are as the thing that is not. If a prefect does not suit their notions, they do their best to have him removed; if this cannot be done, they isolate him. So will you see the inmates of a beehive wall up an intruding snail with wax.

Finally, of the gossip of the salon, history is made. Young married women put in an appearance there occasionally (though the card-table is the one resource) that their conduct may be stamped with the approval of the coterie and their social status confirmed.

Native susceptibilities are sometimes wounded by the supremacy of a single house, but the rest comfort themselves with the thought that they save the expense entailed by the position. Sometimes it happens that no one can afford to keep open house, and then the big-wigs of the place look about them for some harmless person whose character, position, and social standing offer guarantees for the neutrality of the ground, and alarm nobody's vanity or self-interest. This had been the case at Alençon. For a long time past the best society of the town has been wont to assemble in the house of the old maid before mentioned, who little suspected Mme. Granson's designs on her fortune, or the secret hopes of the two elderly bachelors who have just been unmasked.

Mlle. Cormon was Mme. Granson's fourth cousin. She lived with her mother's brother, a sometime vicar-general of the bishopric of Séez; she had been her uncle's ward, and would one day inherit his fortune. Rose-Marie-Victoire Cormon was the last representative of a house which, plebeian though it was, had associated and often allied itself with the noblesse, and ranked among the oldest families in the province. In former times the Cormons had been intendants of the duchy of Alençon, and had given a goodly number of magistrates to the bench, and several bishops to the church. M. de Sponde, Mlle. Cormon's maternal grandfather, was elected by the noblesse to the States-General; and M. Cormon, her father, had been asked to represent the Third Estate, but neither of them accepted the responsibility. For the last century, the daughters of the house had married into the noble families of the province, in such sort that the Cormons were grafted into pretty nearly every genealogical

tree in the duchy. No burgher family came so near being noble.

The house in which the present Mlle. Cormon lived had never passed out of the family since it was built by Pierre Cormon in the reign of Henri IV. ; and of all the old maid's worldly possessions, this one appealed most to the greed of her elderly suitors ; though, so far from bringing in money, the ancestral home of the Cormons was a positive expense to its owner. But it is such an unusual thing, in the very centre of a country town, to find a house handsome without, convenient within, and free from mean surroundings, that all Alençon shared the feeling of envy.

The old mansion stood exactly half-way down the Rue du Val-Noble, *The Val-Noble*, as it was called, probably because the Brillante, the little stream which flows through the town, has hollowed out a little valley for itself in a dip of the land thereabout. The most noticeable feature of the house was its massive architecture, of the style introduced from Italy by Marie de' Medici ; all the corner-stones and facings were cut with diamoned-shaped bosses, in spite of the difficulty of working in the granite of which it is built. It was a two-storied house with a very high-pitched roof, and a row of dormer windows, each with its carved tympanum standing picturesquely enough above the lead-lined parapet with its ornamental balustrade. A grotesque gargoyle, the head of some fantastic bodyless beast, discharged the rain-water through its jaws into the street below, where great stone slabs, pierced with five holes, were placed to receive it. Each gable terminated in a leaden finial, a sign that this was a burgher's house, for none but nobles had a right to put up a weather-cock in olden times. To the right and left of the yard stood the stables and the coach-house ; the kitchen, laundry, and wood-shed. One of the leaves of the great gate used to stand open ; so that passers-by, looking in through the little low wicket with the bell attached, could see the parterre in the

middle of a spacious paved court, and the low-clipped privet hedges which marked out miniature borders full of monthly roses, clove gilliflowers, scabious, lilies, and Spanish broom ; as well as the laurel-bushes and pomegranates and myrtles which grew in tubs put out of doors for the summer.

The scrupulous neatness and tidiness of the place must have struck any stranger, and furnished him with a clue to the old maid's character. The mistress' eyes must have been unemployed, careful, and prying ; less, perhaps, from any natural bent, than for want of any occupation. Who but an elderly spinster, at a loss how to fill an always empty day, would have insisted that no blade of grass should show itself in the paved courtyard, that the wall-copings should be scoured, that the broom should always be busy, that the coach should never be left with the leather curtains undrawn ? Who else, from sheer lack of other employment, could have introduced something like Dutch cleanliness into a little province between Perche, Normandy, and Brittany, where the natives make boast of their crass indifference to comfort ? The chevalier never climbed the steps without reflecting inwardly that the house was fit for a peer of France ; and du Bousquier similarly considered that the Mayor of Alençon ought to live there.

A glass door at the top of the flight of steps gave admittance to an antechamber lighted by a second glass door opposite, above a corresponding flight of steps leading into the garden. This part of the house, a kind of gallery floored with square red tiles, and wainscoted to elbow-height, was a hospital for invalid family portraits ; one here and there had lost an eye or sustained injury to a shoulder, another stood with a hole in the place where his hat should have been, yet another had lost a leg by amputation. Here cloaks, clogs, overshoes, and umbrellas were left ; everybody deposited his belongings in the antechamber on his arrival, and took them again on his departure. A long bench was set against either wall for the servants who came of an evening with their lanterns to fetch

home their masters and mistresses, and a big stove was set in the middle to mitigate the icy blasts which swept across from door to door.

This gallery, then, divided the first floor into two equal parts. The staircase rose to the left on the side nearest the courtyard, the rest of the space being taken up by the great dining-room, with its windows looking out upon the garden, and a pantry beyond, which communicated with the kitchen. To the right lay the salon, lighted by four windows, and a couple of smaller rooms beyond it, a boudoir which gave upon the garden, and a room which did duty as a study and looked into the courtyard. There was a complete suite of rooms on the second floor, beside the Abbé de Sponde's apartments; while the attic story, in all probability roomy enough, had long since been given over to the tenancy of rats and mice. Mlle. Cormon used to report their nocturnal exploits to the Chevalier de Valois, and marvel at the futility of all measures taken against them.

The garden, about half an acre in extent, was bounded by the Brillante, so called from the mica spangles which glitter in its bed; not, however, in the Val-Noble, for the manufacturers and dyers of Alençon pour all their refuse into the shallow stream before it reaches this point; and the opposite bank, as always happens wherever a stream passes through a town, was lined with houses where various thirsty industries were carried on. Luckily, Mlle. Cormon's neighbors were all of them quiet tradesmen—a baker, a fuller, and one or two cabinet-makers. Her garden, full of old-fashioned flowers, naturally ended in a terrace, by way of a quay, with a short flight of steps down to the water's edge. Try to picture the wallflowers growing in blue-and-white glazed jars along the balustrade by the river, behold a shady walk to right and left beneath the square-clipped lime-trees, and you will have some idea of a scene full of unpretending cheerfulness and sober tranquillity; you can see the views of homely humble life

along the opposite bank, the quaint houses, the trickling stream of the *Brillante*, the garden itself, the linden walks under the garden walls, and the venerable home built by the *Cormons*. How peaceful, how quiet it was! If there was no ostentation, there was nothing transitory, everything seemed to last forever there.

The first-floor rooms, therefore, were given over to social uses. You breathed the atmosphere of the Province, ancient, unalterable Province. The great square-shaped salon, with its four doors and four windows, was modestly wainscoted with carved panels, and painted gray. On the wall, above the single oblong mirror on the mantel, the *Hours*, in monochrome, were ushering in the Day. For this particular style of decoration, which used to infest the spaces above doors, the artist's invention devised the eternal Seasons which meet your eyes almost anywhere in central France, till you loathe the detestable Cupids engaged in reaping, skating, sowing seeds, or flinging flowers about. Every window was over-arched with a sort of baldachin with green damask curtains drawn back with cords and huge tassels. The tapestry-covered furniture, with a darn here and there at the edges of the chairs, belonged distinctly to that period of the eighteenth century when curves and contortions were in the very height of fashion; the frames were painted and varnished, the subjects in the medallions on the backs were taken from *La Fontaine*. Four card-tables, a table for piquet, and another for backgammon filled up the immense space. A rock crystal chandelier, shrouded in green gauze, hung suspended from the prominent cross-beam which divided the ceiling, the only plastered ceiling in the house. Two branched candle-sconces were fixed into the wall above the mantel, where a couple of blue *Sèvres* vases stood on either side of a copper-gilt clock which represented a scene taken from "*Le Déserteur*"—a proof of the prodigious popularity of *Sedaine's* work. It was a group of no less than eleven figures, four inches high; the deserter

emerging from jail escorted by a guard of soldiers, while a young person, swooning in the foreground, held out his reprieve. The hearth and fire-irons were of the same date and style. The more recent family portraits—one or two Rigauds and three pastels by Latour—adorned the handsome wainscot panels.

The study, paneled entirely in old lacquer work, red and black and gold, would have fetched fabulous sums a few years later; Mlle. Cormon was as far as possible from suspecting its value; but if she had been offered a thousand crowns for every panel, she would not have parted with a single one. It was a part of her system to alter nothing, and everywhere in the provinces the belief in ancestral hoards is very strong. The boudoir, never used, was hung with the old-fashioned chintz so much run after nowadays by amateurs of the "Pompadour style," as it is called.

The dining-room was paved with black-and-white stone; it had not been ceiled, but the joists and beams were painted. Ranged round the walls, beneath a flowered trellis, painted in fresco, stood the portentous, marble-topped sideboards, indispensable in the warfare waged in the provinces against the powers of digestion. The chairs were cane-seated and varnished, the doors of unpolished walnut-wood. Everything combined admirably to complete the general effect, the old-world air of the house within and without. The provincial spirit had preserved all as it had always been; nothing was new or old, young or decrepit. You felt a sense of chilly precision everywhere.

Any tourist in Brittany, Normandy, Maine, or Anjou must have seen some house more or less like this in one or other provincial town; for the Hôtel de Cormon was in its way a very pattern and model of burgher houses over a large part of France, and the better deserves a place in this chronicle because it is at once a commentary on the manners of the place and the expression of its ideas. Who does not feel, even

now, how much the life within the old walls was one of peaceful routine?

For such library as the house possessed you must have descended rather below the level of the *Brillante*. There stood a solidly clasped oak-bound collection, none the worse, nay, rather the better, for a thick coating of dust; a collection kept as carefully as a cider-growing district is wont to keep the products of the presses of Burgundy, Touraine, Gascony, and the South. Here were works full of native force, and exquisite qualities, with an added perfume of antiquity. No one will import poor wines when the cost of carriage is so heavy.

Mlle. Cormon's whole circle consisted of about a hundred and fifty persons. Of these, some went into the country, some were ill, others from home on business in the department, but there was a faithful band which always came, unless Mlle. Cormon gave an evening party in form; so also did those persons who were bound either by their duties or old habit to live in Alençon itself. All these people were of ripe age. A few among them had traveled, but scarcely any of them had gone beyond the province, and one or two had been implicated in Chouannerie. People could begin to speak freely of the war, now that rewards had come to the heroic defenders of the good cause. M. de Valois had been concerned in the last rising, when the Marquis de Montauran lost his life, betrayed by his mistress; and Marche-à Terre, now peacefully driving a grazier's trade by the banks of the Mayenne, had made a famous name for himself. M. de Valois, during the past six months, had supplied the key to several shrewd tricks played off upon Hulot the old Republican, commander of a demi-brigade stationed at Alençon from 1798 till 1800. There was talk of Hulot yet in the countryside.*

The women made little pretense of dress, except on Wednes-

* See "The Chouans."

days, when Mlle. Cormon gave a dinner party, and last week's guests came to pay their "visit of digestion." On Wednesday evening the rooms were filled. Guests and visitors came in gala dress; here and there a woman brought her knitting or her tapestry work, and some young ladies unblushingly drew patterns for point d'Alençon, by which they supported themselves. Men brought their wives, because there were so few young fellows there; no whisper could pass unnoticed, and therefore there was no danger of love-making for maid or matron. Every evening at six o'clock the lobby was filled with articles of dress, with sticks, cloaks, and lanterns. Every one was so well acquainted, the customs of the house were so primitive, that if by any chance the Abbé de Sponde was in the lime-tree walk, and Mlle. Cormon in her room, neither Josette the maid nor Jacquelin the man thought it necessary to inform them of the arrival of visitors. The first comer waited till some one else arrived; and when they mustered players sufficient for whist or boston, the game was begun without waiting for the Abbé de Sponde or mademoiselle. When it grew dark, Josette or Jacquelin brought lights as soon as the bell rang, and the old abbé out in the garden, seeing the drawing-room windows illuminated, hastened slowly toward the house. Every evening the piquet, boston, and whist tables were full, giving an average of twenty-five or thirty persons, including those who came to chat; but often there were as many as thirty or forty, and then Jacquelin took candles into the study and the boudoir. Between eight and nine at night the servants began to fill the antechamber; and nothing short of a revolution would have found any one in the salon at ten o'clock. At that hour the frequenters of the house were walking home through the streets, discussing the points made, or keeping up a conversation begun in the salon. Sometimes the talk turned on a pocket-handkerchief of land on which somebody had an eye, sometimes it was the division of an inheritance and disputes among the legatees, or the pre-

tensions of the aristocratic set. You see exactly the same thing at Paris when the theatres disgorge.

Some people who talk a great deal about poetry and understand nothing about it are wont to rail at provincial towns and provincial ways ; but lean your forehead on your left hand, as you sit with your feet on the fire-dogs, and rest your elbow on your knee, and then—if you have fully realized for yourself the level, pleasant landscape, the house, the interior, the folk within it and their interests, interests that seem all the larger because the mental horizon is so limited (as a grain of gold is beaten thin between two sheets of parchment)—then ask yourself what human life is. Try to decide between the engraver of the hieroglyphic birds on an Egyptian obelisk, and one of these folk in Alençon playing boston through a score of years with du Bousquier, M. de Valois, Mlle. Cormon, the president of the Tribunal, the public prosecutor, the Abbé de Sponde, Mme. Granson, and all the rest. If the daily round, the daily pacing of the same track in the footsteps of many yesterdays, is not exactly happiness, it is so, much like it that others, driven by dint of storm-tossed days to reflect on the blessings of calm, will say that it is happiness indeed.

To give the exact measure of the importance of Mlle. Cormon's salon, it will suffice to add that du Bousquier, a born statistician, computed that its frequenters mustered among them a hundred and thirty-one votes in the electoral college, and eighteen hundred thousand livres of income derived from lands in the province. The town of Alençon was not, it is true, completely represented there. The aristocratic section, for instance, had a salon of their own, and the receiver-general's house was a sort of official inn kept, as in duty bound, by the Government, where everybody who was anybody danced, flirted, fluttered, fell in love, and supped. One or two unclassified persons kept up the communications between Mlle. Cormon's salon and the other two, but the Cormon salon criticised all that passed in the opposed camps very severely.

Sumptuous dinners gave rise to unfavorable comment ; ices at a dance caused searchings of heart ; the women's behavior and dress and any innovations were much discussed.

Mlle. Cormon being, as it were, the style of the firm and figure-head of an imposing coterie, was inevitably the object of any ambition as profound as that of the du Bousquier or the Chevalier de Valois. To both gentlemen she meant a seat in the Chamber of Deputies, with a peerage for the chevalier, a receiver-general's post for du Bousquier. A salon admittedly of the first rank is every whit as hard to build up in a country town as in Paris. And here was the salon ready made. To marry Mlle. Cormon was to be lord of Alençon. Finally, Athanase, the only one of the three suitors that had ceased to calculate, cared as much for the woman as for her money.

Is there not a whole strange drama (to use the modern cant phrase) in the relative positions of these four human beings ? There is something grotesque, is there not, in the idea of three rival suitors eagerly pressing about an old maid who never so much as suspected their intentions, in spite of her intense and very natural desire to be married ? Yet, although things being so, it may seem an extraordinary thing that she should not have married before, it is not difficult to explain how and why, in spite of her fortune and her three suitors, Mlle. Cormon was still unwed.

From the first, following the family tradition, Mlle. Cormon had always wished to marry a noble, but between the years 1789 and 1799 circumstances were very much against her. While she would have wished to be the wife of a person of condition, she was horribly afraid of the Revolutionary Tribunal ; and these two motives weighing about equally, she remained stationary, according to a law which holds equally good in æsthetics or statics. At the same time, the condition of suspended judgment is not unpleasant for a girl, so long as she feels young and thinks that she can choose where she pleases.

But, as all France knows, the system of government immediately preceding the wars of Napoleon produced a vast number of widows ; and the number of heiresses was altogether out of proportion to the number of eligible men. When order was restored in the country, in the time of the Consulate, external difficulties made marriage as much of a problem as ever for Rose-Marie-Victoire. On the one hand, she declined to marry an elderly man ; and, on the other, dread of ridicule and circumstances put quite young men out of the question. In those days heads of families married their sons as mere boys, because in this way they escaped the conscription. With the obstinacy of a landed proprietor, mademoiselle would not hear of marrying a military man ; she had no wish to take a husband only to give him back to the Emperor, she wished to keep him for herself. And so, between 1804 and 1815, it was impossible to compete with a younger generation of girls, too numerous already in times when cannon-shot had thinned the ranks of marriageable men.

Again, apart from Mlle. Cormon's predilection for birth, she had a very pardonable craze for being loved for her own sake. You would scarcely believe the lengths to which she carried this fancy. She set her wits to work to lay snares for her admirers, to try their sentiments ; and that with such success, that the unfortunates one and all fell into them, and succumbed in the whimsical ordeals through which they passed at unawares. Mlle. Cormon did not study her suitors, she played the spy upon them. A careless word or a joke, and the lady did not understand jokes very well, was excuse enough to dismiss an aspirant as found wanting. This had neither spirit nor delicacy ; that was untruthful and not a Christian ; one wanted to cut down tall timber and coin money under the marriage canopy ; another was not the man to make her happy ; or, again, she had her suspicions of gout in the family, or took fright at her wooer's antecedents. Like mother church, she would fain see a priest without blemish at her altar. And

then Rose-Marie-Victoire made the worst of herself, and was as anxious to be loved, with all her factitious plainness and imaginary faults, as other women are to be married for virtues which they have not and for borrowed beauty. Mlle. Common's ambition had its source in the finest instincts of womanhood. She would reward her lover by discovering to him a thousand virtues after marriage, as other women reveal the many little faults kept hitherto strenuously out of sight. But no one understood. The noble girl came in contact with none but commonplace natures, with whom practical interests came first; the finer calculations of feeling were beyond their comprehension.

She grew more and more suspicious as the critical period so ingenuously called "second youth" drew nearer. Her fancy for making the worst of herself with increasing success frightened away the latest recruits; they hesitated to unite their lot with hers. The strategy of her game of blind-man's bluff (the virtues to be revealed when the finder's eyes were opened) was a complex study for which few men have inclination; they prefer perfection ready-made. An ever-present dread of being married for her money made her unreasonably distrustful and uneasy. She fell foul of the rich, and the rich could look higher; she was afraid of poor men, she would not believe them capable of that disinterestedness on which she set such store; till at length her rejections and other circumstances let in an unexpected light upon the minds of suitors thus presented for her selection like dried peas on a seedman's sieve. Every time a marriage project came to nothing, the unfortunate girl, being gradually led to despise mankind, saw the other sex at last in a false light. Inevitably, in her inmost soul, she grew misanthropic, a tinge of bitterness was infused into her conversation, a certain harshness into her expression. And her manners became more and more rigid under the stress of enforced celibacy; in her despair she sought to perfect herself. It was a characteristic and a noble vengeance.

She would polish and cut for God the rough diamond rejected by men.

Before long public opinion was against Mlle. Cormon. People accept the verdict which a woman passes upon herself if, being free to marry, she fails to fulfill expectations, or is known to have refused eligible suitors. Every one decides that she has her own reasons for declining marriage, and those reasons are always misinterpreted. There was some hidden physical defect or deformity, they said ; but she, poor girl, was pure as an angel, healthy as a child, and overflowing with kindness. Nature had meant her to know all the joys, all the happiness, all the burdens of motherhood.

Yet in her person Mlle. Cormon did not find a natural auxiliary to gain her heart's desire. She had no beauty, save of the kind so improperly called "the devil's ;" that full-blown freshness of youth which, theologically speaking, the devil never could have possessed ; unless, indeed, we are to look for an explanation of the expression in the devil's continual desire of refreshing himself. The heiress' feet were large and flat ; when, on rainy days, she crossed the wet streets between her house and St. Leonard's, her raised skirt displayed (without malice, be it said) a leg which scarcely seemed to belong to a woman, so muscular was it, with a small, firm, prominent calf like a sailor's. She had a figure for a wet nurse. Her thick, honest waist, her strong, plump arms, her red hands ; everything about her, in short, was in keeping with the round, expansive contours and portly fairness of the Norman style of beauty. Wide-open, prominent eyes of no particular color, gave to a face, by no means distinguished in its round outlines, a sheepish, astonished expression not altogether inappropriate, however, in an old maid : even if Rose had not been innocent, she must still have seemed so. An aquiline nose was oddly assorted with a low forehead, for a feature of that type is almost invariably found in company with a lofty brow. In spite of thick, red lips, the

sign of great kindliness of nature, there were evidently so few ideas behind that forehead, that Rose's heart could scarcely have been directed by her brain. Kind she must certainly be, but not gracious. And we are apt to judge the defects of goodness very harshly, while we make the most of the redeeming qualities of vice.

An extraordinary length of chestnut hair lent Rose Cormon such beauty as belongs to vigor and luxuriance, her chief personal characteristics. In the time of her pretensions she had a trick of turning her face in three-quarters profile to display a very pretty ear, gracefully set between the azure-streaked white throat and the temple, and thrown into relief by thick masses of her hair. Dressed in a ball gown, with her head poised at this angle, Rose might almost seem beautiful. With her protuberant bust, her waist, her high health, she used to draw exclamations of admiration from Imperial officers. "What a fine girl!" they used to say.

But, as years went on, the stoutness induced by a quiet, regular life distributed itself so unfortunately over her person, that its original proportions were destroyed. No known variety of corset could have discovered the poor spinster's hips at this period of her existence; she might have been cast in one uniform piece. The youthful proportions of her figure were completely lost; her dimensions had grown so excessive that no one could see her stoop without fearing that, being so top-heavy, she would certainly overbalance herself; but nature had provided a sufficient natural counterpoise, which enabled her to dispense with all adventitious aid from "dress improvers." Everything about Rose was very genuine.

Her chin developed a triple fold, which reduced the apparent length of her throat, and made it no easy matter to turn her head. She had no wrinkles, she had creases. Wags used to assert that she powdered herself, as nurses powder babies, to prevent chafing of the skin. To a young man, consumed, like Athanase, with suppressed desires, this exces-

sive corpulence offered just the kind of physical charm which could not fail to attract youth. Youthful imaginations, essentially intrepid, stimulated by appetite, are prone to dilate upon the beauties of that living expanse. So does the plump partridge allure the epicure's knife. And, indeed, any debt-burdened young man of fashion in Paris would have resigned himself readily enough to fulfilling his part of the contract and making Mademoiselle Cormon happy. Still the unfortunate spinster had already passed her fortieth year!

At this period of enforced loneliness, after the long, vain struggle to fill her life with those interests that are all in all to woman, she was fortifying herself in virtue by the most strict observance of religious duties; she had turned to the great consolation of well-preserved virginity. A confessor, endowed with no great wisdom, had directed Mademoiselle Cormon in the paths of asceticism for some three years past, recommending a system of self-scourging calculated, according to modern doctors, to produce an effect the exact opposite of that expected by the poor priest, whose knowledge of hygiene was but limited. These absurd practices were beginning to bring a certain monastic tinge to Rose Cormon's face; with frequent pangs of despair, she watched the sallow hues of middle age creeping across its natural white and red; while the trace of down about the corners of her upper lip showed a distinct tendency to darken and increase like smoke. Her temples grew shiny. She had passed the turning-point, in fact. It was known for certain in Alençon that Mademoiselle Cormon suffered from heated blood. She inflicted her confidence upon the Chevalier de Valois, reckoning up the number of foot-baths that she took, and devising cooling treatment with him. And that shrewd observer would end by taking out his snuff-box, and gazing at the portrait of the Princess Goritzza as he remarked: "But the real sedative, my dear young lady, would be a good and handsome husband."

"But whom could one trust?" returned she.

But the chevalier only flicked away the powdered snuff from the creases of his paduasoy vest. To anybody else the proceeding would have seemed perfectly natural, but it always made the poor old maid feel uncomfortable.

The violence of her objectless longings grew to such a height that she shrank from looking a man in the face, so afraid was she that the thoughts which pierced her heart might be read in her eyes. It was one of her whims, possibly a later development of her former tactics, to behave almost ungraciously to the possible suitors toward whom she still felt herself attracted, so afraid was she of being accused of folly. Most people in her circle were utterly incapable of appreciating her motives, so noble throughout; they explained her manner to her coevals in single blessedness by a theory of revenge for some past slight.

With the beginning of the year 1815 Rose Cormon had reached the fatal age, to which she did not confess. She was forty-two. By this time her desire to be married had reached a degree of intensity bordering on monomania. She saw her chances of motherhood fast slipping away forever; and, in her divine ignorance, she longed above all things for children of her own. There was not a soul found in Alençon to impute a single unchaste desire to the virtuous girl. She loved love, taking all for granted, without realizing for herself what love would be—a devout Agnès, incapable of inventing one of the little shifts of Molière's heroine.

She had been counting upon chance of late. The disbanding of the Imperial troops and the reconstruction of the King's army was sending a tide of military men back to their native places, some of them on half-pay, some with pensions, some without, and all of them anxious to find some way of amending their bad fortune, and of finishing their days in a fashion which would mean the beginning of happiness for Mlle. Cormon. It would be hard indeed if she could not find a single brave and honorable man among all those who

were coming back to the neighborhood. He must have a sound constitution in the first place, he must be of suitable age, and a man whose personal character would serve as a passport to his Bonapartist opinions; perhaps he might even be willing to turn Royalist for the sake of gaining a lost social position.

Supported by these mental calculations, Mlle. Cormon maintained the severity of her attitude for the first few months of the year; but the men that came back to the town were all either too old or too young, or their characters were too bad, or their opinions too Bonapartist, or their station in life was incompatible with her position, fortune, and habits. The case grew more and more desperate every day. Officers high in the service had used their advantages under Napoleon to marry, and these gentlemen now became Royalists for the sake of their families. In vain had she put up prayers to heaven to send her a husband that she might be happy in Christian fashion; it was written, no doubt, that she should die virgin and martyr, for not a single likely-looking man presented himself.

In the course of conversation in her drawing-room of an evening, the frequenters of the house kept the police register under tolerably strict supervision; no one could arrive at Alençon but they informed themselves at once as to the new-comer's mode of life, quality, and fortune. But, at the same time, Alençon is not a town to attract many strangers; it is not on the high road to any large city; there are no chance arrivals; naval officers on their way to Brest do not so much as stop in the place.

Poor Mlle. Cormon at last comprehended that her choice was reduced to the natives. At times her eyes took an almost fierce expression, to which the chevalier would respond with a keen glance at her as he drew out his snuff-box to gaze at the Princess Goritz. M. de Valois knew that, in feminine jurisprudence, fidelity to an old love is a guarantee for the new.

But Mlle. Cormon, it cannot be denied, was not very intelligent. His snuff-box strategy was wasted upon her.

She redoubled her watchfulness, the better to combat the "evil one," and with devout rigidity and the sternest principles she consigned her cruel sufferings to the secret places of her life.

At night, when she was alone, she thought of her lost youth, of her faded bloom, of the thwarted instincts of her nature; and while she laid her passionate longings at the foot of the cross, together with all the poetry doomed to remain pent within her, she vowed inwardly to take the first man that was willing to marry her, just as he was, without putting him to any proof whatsoever. Sounding her own dispositions, after a series of vigils, each more trying than the last, in her own mind she went so far as to espouse a sub-lieutenant, a tobacco-smoker to boot; nay, he was even head over ears in debt. Him she proposed to transform with care, submission, and gentleness into a pattern for mankind. But only in the silence of night could she plan these imaginary marriages, in which she amused herself with playing the sublime part of guardian angel; with morning, if Josette found her mistress' bed-clothes turned topsy-turvy, mademoiselle had recovered her dignity; with morning, after breakfast, she would have nothing less than a solid landowner, a well-preserved man of forty—a young man—as you may say.

The Abbé de Sponde was incapable of giving his niece assistance of any sort in schemes for marriage. The good man, aged seventy or thereabout, referred all the calamities of the Revolution to the design of a providence prompt to punish a dissolute church. For which reasons M. de Sponde had long since entered upon a deserted path to heaven, the way trodden by the hermits of old. He led an ascetic life, simply, unobtrusively; hiding his deeds of charity, his constant prayer and fasting from all other eyes. Necessity was laid upon all priests, he thought, to do as he did; he preached

by example, turning a serene and smiling face upon the world, while he completely cut himself off from worldly interests. All his thoughts were given to the afflicted, to the needs of the church, and the saving of his own soul. He left the management of his property to his niece. She paid over his yearly income to him, and, after a slight deduction for his maintenance, the whole of it went in private almsgiving or in donations to the church.

All the abbé's affections were centred upon his niece, and she looked upon him as a father. He was a somewhat absent-minded father, however, without the remotest conception of the rebellion of the flesh; a father who gave thanks to God for maintaining his beloved daughter in a state of virginity; for from his youth up he had held, with St. John Chrysostom, "that virginity is as much above the estate of marriage as the angels are above man."

Mlle. Cormon was accustomed to look up to her uncle; she did not venture to confide her wishes for a change of condition to him; and he, good man, on his side was accustomed to the ways of the house, and perhaps might not have relished the introduction of a master into it. Absorbed in thoughts of the distress which he relieved, or lost in fathomless inner depths of prayer, he was often unconscious of what was going on about him; frequenters of the house set this down to absent-mindedness; but while he said little, his silence was neither unsociable nor ungenial. A tall, spare, grave, and solemn man, his face told of kindly feeling and a great inward peace. His presence in the house seemed, as it were, to consecrate it. The abbé entertained a strong liking for that elderly skeptic the Chevalier de Valois. Far apart as their lives were, the two grand wrecks of the eighteenth-century clergy and noblesse recognized each other by generic signs and tokens; and the chevalier, for that matter, could converse with unction with the abbé, just as he talked like a father with his grisettes.

Some may think that Mlle. Cormon would leave no means

untried to gain her end ; that among other permissible feminine artifices, for instance, she would turn to her toilettes, wear low-cut bodices, use the passive coquetry of a display of the splendid equipment with which she might take the field. On the contrary, she was as heroic and steadfast in her high-necked gown as a sentry in his sentry-box. All her dresses, bonnets, and finery were made in Alençon by two hunch-backed sisters, not wanting in taste. But in spite of the entreaties of the two artists, Mlle. Cormon utterly declined the adventitious aid of elegance ; she must be substantial throughout, body and plumage, and possibly her heavy-looking dresses became her not amiss. Laugh who will at her, poor thing. Generous natures, those who never trouble themselves about the form in which good feeling shows itself, but admire it wherever they find it, will see something sublime in this trait. Perhaps some slight-natured feminine critic may begin to carp, and say that there is no woman in France so simple but that she can angle for a husband, that Mlle. Cormon is one of those abnormal creatures which commonsense forbids us to take for a type ; that the best or the most babyish unmarried woman that has a mind to hook a gudgeon can put forward some physical charm wherewith to bait her line. But when you begin to think that the sublime Apostolic Roman Catholic is still a power in Brittany and the ancient duchy of Alençon, these criticisms fall to the ground. Faith and piety admit no such subtleties. Mlle. Cormon kept to the straight path, preferring the misfortune of a maidenhood infinitely prolonged to the misery of untruthfulness, to the sin of small deceit. Armed with self-discipline, such a girl cannot make a sacrifice of a principle ; and therefore love (or self-interest) must make a very determined effort to find her out and win her.

Let us have the courage to make a confession, painful in these days when religion is nothing but a means of advancement for some, a dream for others ; the devout are subject to

a kind of moral ophthalmia, which, by the especial grace of providence, removes a host of small earthly concerns out of the sight of the pilgrim of eternity. In a word, the devout are apt to be dense in a good many ways. Their stupidity, at the same time, is a measure of the force with which their spirits turn heavenward; albeit the skeptical M. de Valois maintained that it is a moot point whether stupid women take naturally to piety or whether piety, on the other hand, has a stupefying effect upon an intelligent girl.

It must be borne in mind that it is the purest orthodox goodness, ready to drink rapturously of every cup set before it, to submit devoutly to the will of God, to see the print of the divine finger everywhere in the clay of life—that it is catholic virtue stealing like hidden light into the innermost recesses of this history that alone can bring everything into right relief, and widen its significance for those who yet have faith. And, again, if the stupidity is admitted, why should the misfortunes of stupidity be less interesting than the woes of genius in a world where fools so overwhelmingly preponderate?

To resume: Mlle. Cormon's divine girlish ignorance of life was an offense in the eyes of the world. She was anything but observant, as her treatment of her suitors sufficiently showed. At this very moment, a girl of sixteen who had never opened a novel in her life might have read a hundred chapters of romance in Athanase's eyes. But Mlle. Cormon saw nothing all the while; she never knew that the young man's voice was unsteady with emotion which he dared not express, and the woman who could invent refinements of high sentiment to her own undoing could not discern the same feelings in Athanase.

Those who know that qualities of heart and brain are as independent of each other as genius and greatness of soul will see nothing extraordinary in this psychological phenomenon. A complete human being is so rare a prodigy that Socrates, that pearl among mankind, agreed with a contemporary phre-

nologist that he himself was born to be a very scurvy knave. A great general may save his country at Zurich, and yet take a commission from contractors; a banker's doubtful honesty does not prevent him from being a statesman; a great composer may give the world divine music, and yet forge another man's signature; and a woman of refined feeling may be excessively weak-minded. In short, a devout woman may have a very lofty soul, and yet have no ears to hear the voice of another noble soul at her side.

The unaccountable freaks of physical infirmity find a parallel in the moral world. Here was a good creature making her preserves and breaking her heart till she grew almost ridiculous, because, forsooth, there was no one to eat them but her uncle and herself. Those who sympathized with her for the sake of her good qualities, or, in some cases, on account of her defects, used to laugh over her disappointments. People began to wonder what would become of so fine a property with all Mlle. Cormon's savings, and her uncle's to boot.

It was long since they began to suspect that at bottom, and in spite of appearances, Mlle. Cormon was "an original." Originality is not allowed in the provinces; originality means that you have ideas which nobody else can understand, and in a country town people's intellects, like their manner of life, must all be on a level. Even in 1804 Rose's matrimonial prospects were considered so problematical, that "to marry like Mlle. Cormon" was a current saying in Alençon, and the most ironical way of suggesting Such-an-one would never marry at all.

The necessity to laugh at some one must indeed be imperious in France, if any one could be found to raise a smile at the expense of that excellent creature. Not merely did she entertain the whole town, she was charitable, she was good; she was incapable of saying a spiteful word; and more than that, she was so much in unison with the whole spirit of the place, its manners and its customs, that she was generally be-

loved as the very incarnation of the life of the province ; she had imbibed all its prejudices and made its interests hers ; she had never gone beyond its limits, she adored it ; she was imbedded in provincial tradition. In spite of her eighteen thousand livres per annum, a tolerably large income for the neighborhood, she accommodated herself to the ways of her less wealthy neighbors. When she went to her country house, the Prébaudet, for instance, she drove over in an old-fashioned wicker cariole hung with white leather straps, and fitted with a couple of rusty weather-beaten leather curtains, which scarcely closed it in. The equipage, drawn by a fat, broken-winded mare, was known all over the town. Jacquelin, the manservant, cleaned it as carefully as if it had been the finest carriage from Paris. Mademoiselle was fond of it ; it had lasted her a dozen years, a fact which she was wont to point out with the triumphant joy of contented parsimony. Most people were grateful to her for forbearing to humiliate them by splendor which she might have flaunted before their eyes ; it is even credible that if she had sent for a calèche from Paris, it would have caused more talk than any of her "disappointments." After all, the finest carriage in the world, like the old-fashioned cariole, could only have taken her to the Prébaudet ; and in the provinces they always keep the end in view, and trouble themselves very little about the elegance of the means, provided that they are sufficient.

To complete the picture of Mlle. Cormon's household and domestic life, several figures must be grouped round Mlle. Cormon and the Abbé de Sponde. Jacquelin, and Josette, and Mariette, the cook, ministered to the comfort of uncle and niece.

Jacquelin, a man of forty, short and stout, dark-haired and ruddy, with a countenance of the Breton sailor type, had been in service in the house for twenty-two years. He waited at table, groomed the mare, worked in the garden, cleaned the abbé's shoes, ran errands, chopped firewood, drove the cariole,

went to the Prébaudet for corn, hay, and straw, and slept like a dormouse in the antechamber of an evening. He was supposed to be fond of Josette, and Josette was six-and-thirty. But if she had married him, Mlle. Cormon would have dismissed her, and so the poor lovers were fain to save up their wages in silence, and to wait and hope for mademoiselle's marriage, much as the Jews look for the advent of the Messiah.

Josette came from the district between Alençon and Mortagne; she was a fat little woman. Her face, which reminded you of a mud-bespattered apricot, was not wanting either in character or intelligence. She was supposed to rule her mistress. Josette and Jacquelin, feeling sure of the event, found consolation, presumably, by discounting the future. Mariette, the cook, had likewise been in the family for fifteen years; she was skilled in the cookery of the country and the preparation of the most esteemed provincial dishes.

Perhaps the fat, old bay mare, of the Normandy breed, which Mlle. Cormon used to drive to the Prébaudet, ought to count for a good deal, for the affection which the five inmates of the house bore the animal amounted to mania. Penelope, for that was her name, had been with them for eighteen years; and so well was she cared for, so regularly tended, that Jacquelin and mademoiselle hoped to get quite another ten years of work out of her. Penelope was a stock subject and source of interest in their lives. It seemed as if poor Mlle. Cormon, with no child of her own, lavished all her maternal affection upon the lucky beast. Almost every human being leading a solitary life in a crowded world will surround himself with a make-believe family of some sort, and Penelope took the place of dogs, cats, or canaries.

These four faithful servants—for Penelope's intelligence had been trained till it was very nearly on a par with the wits of the other three, while they had sunk pretty much into the dumb, submissive jog-trot life of the animal—these four retainers

came and went and did the same things day after day, with the unfailing regularity of clockwork. But, to use their own expression, "they had first eaten their white bread." Mlle. Cormon suffered from a fixed idea upon the nerves; and, after the wont of such sufferers, she grew fidgety and hard to please, not by force of nature, but because she had no outlet for her energies. She had neither husband nor children to fill her thoughts, so they fastened upon trifles. She would talk for hours at a stretch of some inconceivably small matter, of a dozen serviettes, for instance, lettered Z, which somehow or other had been put before O.

"Why, what can Josette be thinking about?" she cried. "Has she no notion what she is doing?"

Jacquelin chanced to be late in feeding Penelope one afternoon, so every day for a whole week afterward mademoiselle inquired whether the horse had been fed at two o'clock. Her narrow imagination spent itself on small matters. A layer of dust forgotten by the feather-duster, a slice of scorched toast, an omission to close the blinds on Jacquelin's part when the sun shone in upon furniture and carpets—all these important trifles produced serious trouble, mademoiselle lost her temper over them. "Nothing was the same as it used to be. The servants of old days were so changed that she did not know them. They were spoilt. She was too good to them," and so forth and so forth. One day Josette gave her mistress the "*Journée du Chrétien*"* instead of the "*Quinzaine de Pâques*."† The whole town heard of the mistake before night. Mademoiselle had been obliged to get up and come out of church, disturbing whole rows of chairs and raising the wildest conjectures, so that she was obliged afterward to give all her friends a full account of the mishap.

"Josette," she said mildly, when she had come the whole way home from St. Leonard's, "this must never happen again."

* The Christian's Journey.

† Fifteen Easters.

Mlle. Cormon was far from suspecting that it was a very fortunate thing for her that she could vent her spleen in petty squabbles. The mind, like the body, requires exercise; these quarrels were a sort of mental gymnastics. Josette and Jacquelin took such unevennesses of temper as the agricultural laborer takes the changes of the weather. The three good souls could say among themselves that "It is a fine day," or "It rains," without murmuring against the powers above. Sometimes in the kitchen of a morning they would wonder in what humor mademoiselle would wake, much as a farmer studies the morning mists. And of necessity Mlle. Cormon ended by seeing herself in all the infinitely small details which made up her life. Herself and God, her confessor and her washing-days, the preserves to be made, the services of the church to attend, and the uncle to take care of—all these things absorbed faculties that were none of the strongest. For her the atoms of life were magnified by virtue of an optical process peculiar to the selfish or the self-absorbed. To so perfectly healthy a woman, the slightest symptom of indigestion was a positively alarming portent. She lived, moreover, under the ferule of the system of medicine practiced by our grandsires; a drastic purgative dose fit to kill Penelope, taken four times a year, merely gave Mlle. Cormon a fillip.

What tremendous ransackings of the week's dietary if Josette, assisting her mistress to dress, discovered a scarcely visible pimple on shoulders that still boasted a satin skin! What triumph if the maid could bring a certain hare to her mistress' recollection, and trace the accursed pimple to its origin in that too heating article of food! With what joy the two women would cry: "It is the hare beyond a doubt!"

"Mariette over-seasoned it," mademoiselle would add; "I always tell her not to overdo it for my uncle and me, but Mariette has no more memory than——"

"Than the hare," suggested Josette.

"It is the truth," returned mademoiselle; "she has no more memory than the hare; you have just hit it."

Four times in a year, at the beginning of each season, Mlle. Cormon went to spend a certain number of days at the Prébaudet. It was now the middle of May, when she liked to see how her apple trees had "snowed," as they say in the cider country, an allusion to the white blossoms strewn in the orchards in the spring. When the circles of fallen petals look like snowdrifts under the trees, the proprietor may hope to have abundance of cider in the autumn. Mlle. Cormon estimated her barrels, and at the same time superintended any necessary after-winter repairs, planning out work in the garden and orchard, from which she drew no inconsiderable supplies. Each time of year had its special business.

Mademoiselle used to give a farewell dinner to her faithful inner circle before leaving, albeit she would see them again at the end of three weeks. All Alençon knew when the journey was to be undertaken. Any one that had fallen behindhand immediately paid a call, her drawing-room was filled; everybody wished her a prosperous journey, as if she had been starting for Calcutta. Then, in the morning, all the tradespeople were standing in their doorways; every one, great and small, watched the cariole go past, and it seemed as if everybody learned a piece of fresh news when one repeated after another, "So Mademoiselle Cormon is going to the Prébaudet."

One would remark: "She has bread ready baked, she has!"

And his neighbor would return: "Eh! my lad, she is a good woman; if property always fell into such hands as hers, there would not be a beggar to be seen in the countryside."

Or another would exclaim: "Halloo! I should not wonder if our oldest vines are in flower, for there is Mademoiselle Cormon setting out for the Prébaudet. How comes it that she is so little given to marrying?"

"I should be quite ready to marry her, all the same," a

wag would answer. "The marriage is half made—one side is willing, but the other isn't. Pooh! the oven is heating for Monsieur du Bousquier."

"*Monsieur du Bousquier?* She has refused him."

At every house that evening people remarked solemnly: "Mademoiselle Cormon has gone."

Or perhaps: "So you have let Mademoiselle Cormon go!"

The Wednesday selected by Suzanne for making a scandal chanced to be this very day of leave-taking, when Mlle. Cormon nearly drove Josette to distraction over the packing of the parcels which she meant to take with her. A good deal that was done and said in the town that morning was like to lend additional interest to the farewell gathering at night. While the old maid was busily making preparations for her journey; while the astute chevalier was playing his game of piquet in the house of Mlle. Armande de Gordes, sister of the aged Marquis de Gordes and queen of the aristocratic salon, Mme. Granson had sounded the alarm bell in half a score of houses. There was not a soul but felt some curiosity to see what sort of figure the seducer would cut that evening; and to Mme. Granson and the Chevalier de Valois it was an important matter to know how Mlle. Cormon would take the news, in her double quality of marriageable spinster and lady president of the Maternity Fund. As for the unsuspected du Bousquier, he was taking the air on the parade. He was just beginning to think that Suzanne had made a fool of him; and this suspicion only confirmed the rules which he had laid down with regard to womankind.

On these high days the cloth was laid about half-past three in the Cormon house. Four o'clock was the state dinner hour in Alençon, on ordinary days they dined at two, as in the time of the Empire; but then, they supped!

Mlle. Cormon always felt an inexpressible sense of satisfaction when she was dressed to receive her guests as mistress of her house. It was one of the pleasures which she most

relished, be it said without malice, though egoism certainly lay beneath the feeling. When thus arrayed for conquest, a ray of hope slid across the darkness of her soul; a voice within her cried that nature had not endowed her so abundantly in vain, that surely some enterprising man was about to appear for her. She felt the younger for the wish and the fresher for her toilet; she looked at her stout figure with a certain elation; and afterward, when she went downstairs to submit salon, study, and boudoir to an awful scrutiny, this sense of satisfaction still remained with her. To and fro she went, with the naïve contentment of the rich man who feels conscious at every moment that he is rich and will lack for nothing all his life long. She looked round upon her furniture, the eternal furniture, the antiquities, the lacquered panels, and told herself that such fine things ought to have a master.

After admiring the dining-room, where the space was filled by the long table with its snowy cloth, its score of covers symmetrically laid; after going through the roll-call of a squadron of bottles ordered up from the cellar, and making sure that each bore an honorable label; and finally, after a most minute verification of a score of little slips of paper on which the abbé had written the names of the guests with a trembling hand—it was the sole occasion on which he took an active part in the household, and the place of every guest always gave rise to grave discussion—after this review, Mlle. Cormon in her fine array went into the garden to join her uncle; for at this pleasantest hour of the day he used to walk up and down the terrace beside the Brillante, listening to the twittering of the birds, which, hidden closely among the leaves in the lime-tree walk, knew no fear of boys or sportsmen.

Mlle. Cormon never came out to the abbé during these intervals of waiting without asking some hopelessly absurd question, in the hope of drawing the good man into a discus-

sion which might interest him. Her reasons for so doing must be given, for this very characteristic trait adds the finishing touch to her portrait.

Mlle. Cormon considered it a duty to talk; not that she was naturally loquacious, for, unfortunately, with her dearth of ideas and very limited stock of phrases, it was difficult to hold forth at any length; but she thought that in this way she was fulfilling the social duties prescribed by religion, which bids us be agreeable to our neighbor. It was a duty which weighed so much upon her mind that she had submitted this case of conscience out of the "Child's Guide to Manners" to her director, the Abbé Couturier. Whereupon, so far from being disarmed by the penitent's humble admission of the violence of her mental struggles to find something to say, the old ecclesiastic, being firm in matters of discipline, read her a whole chapter out of St. François de Sales on the "Duties of a Woman in the World;" on the decent gayety of the pious Christian female, and the duty of confining her austerities to herself; a woman, according to this authority, ought to be amiable in her home and to act in such sort that her neighbor never feels dull in her company. After this, Mlle. Cormon, with a deep sense of duty, was anxious to obey her director at any cost. He had bidden her to discourse agreeably, so every time the conversation languished she felt the perspiration breaking out over her with the violence of her exertions to find something to say which should stimulate the flagging interest. She would come out with odd remarks at such times. Once she revived, with some success, a discussion on the ubiquity of the apostles (of which she understood not a syllable) by the unexpected observation that "You cannot be in two places at once unless you are a bird." With such conversational cues as these, the lady had earned the title of "dear, good Mademoiselle Cormon" in her set, which phrase, in the mouth of local wits, might be taken to mean that she was as ignorant as a carp, and a bit of a "natural;" but there

were plenty of people of her own calibre to take the remark literally, and reply: "Oh, yes, Mademoiselle Cormon is very good."

Sometimes (always in her desire to be agreeable to her guests and fulfill her duties as a hostess) she asked such absurd questions that everybody burst out laughing. She wanted to know, for example, what the Government did with the taxes which it had been receiving all these years; or how it was that the Bible had not been printed in the time of Christ, seeing that it had been written by Moses. Altogether she was on a par with the English country gentleman, a member of the House of Commons, who made the famous speech in which he said: "I am always hearing of Posterity; I should very much like to know what Posterity has done for the country."

On such occasions, the heroic Chevalier de Valois came to the rescue, bringing up all the resources of his wit and tact at the sight of the smiles exchanged by pitiless smatterers. He loved to give to woman, did this elderly noble; he lent his wit to Mlle. Cormon by coming to her assistance with a paradox, and covered her retreat so well, that sometimes it seemed as if she had said nothing foolish. She once owned seriously that she did not know the difference between an ox* and a bull. The enchanting chevalier stopped the roars of laughter by saying that oxen could never be more than uncles to the bullocks. Another time, hearing much talk of cattle-breeding and its difficulties—a topic which often comes up in conversation in the neighborhood of the superb du Pin stud—she so far grasped the technicalities of horse-breeding as to ask: "Why, if they wanted colts, they did not serve a mare twice a year?" The chevalier drew down the laughter upon himself.

"It is quite possible," said he. The company pricked up its ears.

"The fault lies with the naturalists," he continued; "they

* Draught oxen are emasculated.

have not found out how to breed mares that are less than eleven months in foal."

Poor Mlle. Cormon no more understood the meaning of the words than the difference between the ox and the bull. The chevalier met with no gratitude for his pains; his chivalrous services were beyond the reach of the lady's comprehension. She saw that the conversation grew livelier; she was relieved to find that she was not so stupid as she imagined. A day came at last when she settled down in her ignorance, like the Duc de Brancas; and the hero of "*Le Distrain*," it may be remembered, made himself so comfortable in the ditch after his fall that, when the people came to pull him out, he asked what they wanted with him. Since a somewhat recent period Mlle. Cormon had lost her fears. She brought out her conversational cues with a self-possession akin to that solemn manner—the very coxcombry of stupidity—which accompanies the fatuous utterances of British patriotism.

As she went with stately steps toward the terrace, therefore, she was chewing the cud of reflection, seeking for some question which should draw her uncle out of a silence which always hurt her feelings; she thought that he felt dull.

"Uncle," she began, hanging on his arm, and nestling joyously close to him (for this was another of her make-believes, "If I had a husband, I should do just so!" she thought); "uncle, if everything on earth happens by the will of God, there must be a reason for everything."

"Assuredly," the Abbé de Sponde answered gravely. He loved his niece, and submitted with angelic patience to be torn from his meditations.

"Then if I never marry at all, it will be because it is the will of God?"

"Yes, my child."

"But still, as there is nothing to prevent me from marrying to-morrow, my will perhaps might thwart the will of God?"

"That might be so, if we really knew God's will," returned

the sub-prior of the Sorbonne. "Remark, my dear, that you insert an *if*."

Poor Rose was bewildered. She had hoped to lead her uncle to the subject of marriage by way of an argument *ad omnipotentem*. But the naturally obtuse are wont to adopt the remorseless logic of childhood, which is to say, they proceed from the answer to another question, a method frequently found embarrassing.

"But, uncle," she persisted, "God cannot mean women never to marry; for if He did, all of them ought to be either unmarried or married. Their lots are distributed unjustly."

"My child," said the good abbé, "you are finding fault with the church, which teaches that celibacy is a more excellent way to God."

"But if the church was right, and everybody was a good Catholic, there would soon be no more people, uncle."

"You are too ingenious, Rose; there is no need to be so ingenious to be happy."

Such words brought a smile of satisfaction to poor Rose's lips and confirmed her in the good opinion which she began to conceive of herself. Behold how the world, like our friends and enemies, contributes to strengthen our faults. At this moment guests began to arrive, and the conversation was interrupted. On these high festival occasions, the disposition of the rooms brought about little familiarities between the servants and invited guests. Mariette saw the president of the Tribunal, a triple expansion glutton, as he passed by her kitchen.

"Oh, Monsieur du Ronceret, I have been making cauliflower *au gratin* on purpose for you, for mademoiselle knows how fond you are of it. 'Mind you do not fail with it, Mariette,' she said; 'Monsieur le Président is coming.'"

"Good Mademoiselle Cormon," returned the man of law. "Mariette, did you baste the cauliflowers with gravy instead of stock? It is more savory." And the president did not

disdain to enter the council-chamber where Mariette ruled the roast, nor to cast an epicure's eye over her preparations, and give his opinion as a master of the craft.

"Good-day, madame," said Josette, addressing Mme. Granson, who sedulously cultivated the waiting-woman. "Mademoiselle has not forgotten you; you are to have a dish of fish."

As for the Chevalier de Valois, he spoke to Mariette with the jocularly of a great noble unbending to an inferior—

"Well, dear cordon bleu, I would give you the cross of the Legion of Honor if I could; tell me, is there any dainty morsel for which one ought to save one's self?"

"Yes, yes, Monsieur de Valois, a hare from the Prébaudet; it weighed fourteen pounds!"

"That's a good girl," said the chevalier, patting Josette on the cheek with two fingers. "Ah! weighs fourteen pounds, does it?"

Du Bousquier was not of the party. Mlle. Cormon treated him hardly, faithful to her system before described. In the very bottom of her heart she felt an inexplicable drawing toward this man of fifty, whom she had once refused. Sometimes she repented of that refusal, and yet she had a presentiment that she should marry him after all, and a dread of him which forbade her to wish for the marriage. These ideas stimulated her interest in du Bousquier. The Republican's herculean proportions produced an effect upon her which she would not admit to herself; and the Chevalier de Valois and Mme. Granson, while they could not explain Mlle. Cormon's inconsistencies, had detected naïve, furtive glances, sufficiently clear in their significance to set them both on the watch to ruin the hopes which du Bousquier clearly entertained in spite of a first check.

Two guests kept the others waiting, but their official duties excused them both. One was M. du Coudrai, registrar of mortgages; the other, M. Choissel, had once acted as

land-steward to the Marquis de Gordes. Choissnel was the notary of the old noblesse, and received everywhere among them with the distinction which his merits deserved; he had beside a not inconsiderable private fortune. When the two late-comers arrived, Jacquelin, the manservant, seeing them turn to go into the drawing-room, came forward with: "‘They’ are all in the garden."

The registrar of mortgages was one of the most amiable men in the town. There were but two things against him—he had married an old woman for her money in the first place, and in the second it was his habit to perpetrate outrageous puns, at which he was the first to laugh. But, doubtless, the stomachs of the guests were growing impatient, for at first sight he was hailed with that faint sigh which usually welcomes last-comers under such circumstances. Pending the official announcement of dinner, the company strolled up and down the terrace by the *Brillante*, looking out over the stream with its bed of mosaic and its water-plants, at the so picturesque details of the row of houses huddled together on the opposite bank; the old-fashioned wooden balconies, the tumble-down window-sills, the balks of timber that shored up a story projecting over the river, the cabinet-maker's workshop, the tiny gardens where odds and ends of clothing were hanging out to dry. It was, in short, the poor quarter of a country town, to which the near neighborhood of the water, a weeping willow drooping over the bank, a rosebush or so, and a few flowers had lent an indescribable charm, worthy of a landscape painter's brush.

The chevalier meanwhile was narrowly watching the faces of the guests. He knew that his firebrand had very successfully taken hold of the best coteries in the town; but no one spoke openly of Suzanne and du Bousquier and the great news as yet. The art of distilling scandal is possessed by provincials in a supreme degree. It was felt that the time was not yet ripe for open discussion of the strange event. Every one

was bound to go through a private rehearsal first. So it was whispered—

“Have you heard?”

“Yes.”

“Du Bousquier?”

“And the fair Suzanne.”

“Does Mademoiselle Cormon know anything?”

“No.”

“Ah!”

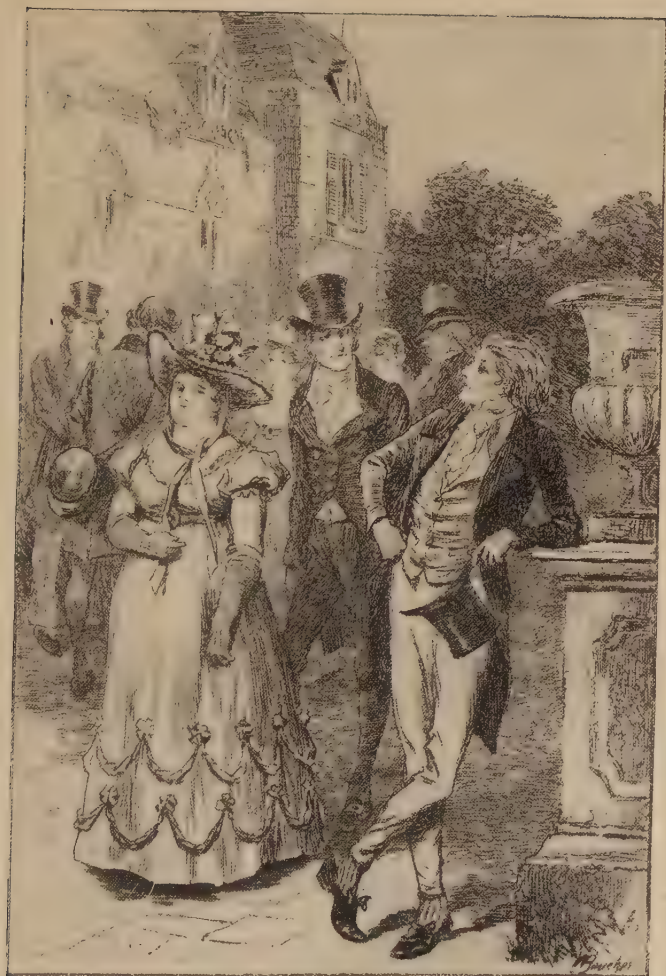
This was gossip *piano*, presently destined to swell into a *crescendo* when they were ready to discuss the first dish of scandal.

All of a sudden the chevalier confronted Mme. Granson. That lady had sported her green bonnet, trimmed with auralas; her face was beaming. Was she simply longing to begin the concert? Such news is as good as a gold-mine to be worked in the monotonous lives of these people; but the observant and uneasy chevalier fancied that he read something more in the good lady's expression—to wit, the exultation of self-interest! At once he turned to look at Athanase, and detected in his silence the signs of profound concentration of some kind. In another moment the young man's glance at Mlle. Cormon's figure, which sufficiently resembled a pair of regimental kettledrums, shot a sudden light across the chevalier's brain. By that gleam he could read the whole past.

“Egad!” he said to himself, “what a slap in the face I have laid myself out to get!”

He went across to offer his arm to Mlle. Cormon, so that he might afterward take her in to dinner. She regarded the chevalier with respectful esteem; for, in truth, with his name and position in the aristocratic constellations of the province, he was one of the most brilliant ornaments of her salon. In her heart of hearts, she had longed to be Mme. de Valois at any time during the past twelve years. The name was like a branch for the swarming thoughts of her brain to cling about

AT ONCE HE TURNED TO LOOK AT ATHANASE



—he fulfilled all her ideals as to the birth, quality, and externals of an eligible man. But while the Chevalier de Valois was the choice of heart and brain and social ambition, the elderly ruin, curled though he was like a St. John of a procession-day, filled Mlle. Cormon with dismay; the heiress saw nothing but the noble; the woman could not think of him as a husband. The chevalier's affectation of indifference to marriage, and still more his unimpeachable character in a houseful of workgirls, had seriously injured him, contrary to his own expectations. The man of quality, so clear-sighted in the matter of the annuity, miscalculated on this subject; and Mlle. Cormon herself was not aware that her private reflections upon the too well-conducted chevalier might have been translated by the remark: "What a pity that he is not a little bit of a rake!"

Students of human nature have remarked these leanings of the saint toward the sinner, and wondered at a taste so little in accordance, as they imagine, with Christian virtue. But, to go no further, what nobler destiny for a virtuous woman than the task of cleansing, after the manner of charcoal, the turbid waters of vice? How is it that nobody has seen that these generous creatures, confined by their principles to strict conjugal fidelity, must naturally desire a mate of great practical experience? A reformed rake makes the best husband. And so it came to pass that the poor spinster must sigh over the chosen vessel, offered her as it were in two pieces. Heaven alone could weld the Chevalier du Valois and du Bousquier in one.

If the significance of the few words exchanged between the chevalier and Mlle. Cormon is to be properly understood, it is necessary to put other matters before the reader. Two very serious questions were dividing Alençon into two camps, and, moreover, du Bousquier was mixed up in both affairs in some mysterious way. The first of these debates concerned the curé. He had taken the oath of allegiance in the time of the

Revolution, and now was living down orthodox prejudices by setting an example of the loftiest goodness. He was a Cheverus on a smaller scale, and so much was he appreciated, that when he died the whole town wept for him. Mlle. Cormon and the Abbé de Sponde belonged, however, to the minority, to the church sublime in its orthodoxy, a section which was to the Court of Rome as the Ultras were shortly to be to the Court of Louis XVIII. The abbé, in particular, declined to recognize the church that had submitted to force and made terms with the Constitutionnels. So the curé was never seen in the salon of the Maison Cormon, and the sympathies of its frequenters were with the officiating priest of St. Leonard's, the aristocratic church in Alençon. Du Bousquier, that rabid Liberal under a Royalist's skin, knew how necessary it is to find standards to rally the discontented, who form, as it were, the back-shop of every opposition, and therefore he had already enlisted the sympathies of the trading classes for the curé.

Now for the second affair. The same blunt diplomatist was the secret instigator of a scheme for building a theatre, an idea which had only lately sprouted in Alençon. Du Bousquier's zealots knew not their Mahomet, but they were the more ardent in their defense of what they believed to be their own plan. Athanase was one of the very hottest of the partisans in favor of the theatre; in the mayor's office for several days past he had been pleading for the cause which all the younger men had taken up.

To return to the chevalier. He offered his arm to Mlle. Cormon, who thanked him with a radiant glance for this attention. For all answer, the chevalier indicated Athanase by a meaning look.

"Mademoiselle," he began, "as you have such well-balanced judgment in matters of social convention, and as that young man is related to you in some way——"

"Very distantly," she broke in.

"Ought you not to use the influence which you possess with him and his mother to prevent him from going utterly to the bad? He is not very religious as it is; he defends that perjured priest; but that is nothing. It is a much more serious matter; is he not plunging thoughtlessly into opposition without realizing how his conduct may affect his prospects? He is scheming to build this theatre; he is the dupe of that Republican in disguise, du Bousquier——"

"Dear me, Monsieur de Valois, his mother tells me that he is so clever, and he has not a word to say for himself; he always stands planted before you like a 'statue'——"

"Of limitations," cried the registrar. "I caught that flying. I present my *devoirs* to the Chevalier de Valois," he added, saluting the latter with the exaggeration of Henri Monnier as "Joseph Prudhomme," an admirable type of the class to which M. du Coudrai belonged.

M. de Valois, in return, gave him the abbreviated patronizing nod of a noble standing on his dignity; then he drew Mlle. Cormon farther along the terrace by the distance of several flower-pots, to make the registrar understand that he did not wish to be overheard.

Then, lowering his voice, he bent to say in Mlle. Cormon's ear: "How can you expect that lads educated in these detestable Imperial Lyceums should have any ideas? Great ideas and a lofty love can only come of right courses and nobleness of life. It is not difficult to foresee, from the look of the poor fellow, that he will be weak in his intellect and come to a miserable end. See how pale and haggard he looks!"

"His mother says that he works far too hard," she replied innocently. "He spends his nights, think of it! in reading books and writing. What good can it possibly do a young man's prospects to sit up writing at night?"

"Why, it exhausts him," said the chevalier, trying to bring the lady's thoughts back to the point, which was to disgust

her with Athanase. "The things that went on in those Imperial Lyceums were something really shocking."

"Oh yes," said the simple lady. "Did they not make them walk out with drums in front? The masters had no more religion than heathens; and they put them in uniform, poor boys, exactly as if they had been soldiers. What notions!"

"And see what comes of it," continued the chevalier, indicating Athanase. "In my time, where was the young man that could not look a pretty woman in the face? Now, *he* lowers his eyes as soon as he sees you. That young man alarms me, because I am interested in him. Tell him not to intrigue with Bonapartists, as he is doing, to build this theatre; if these little youngsters do not raise an insurrection and demand it (for insurrection and constitution, to my mind, are two words for the same thing), the authorities will build it. And tell his mother to look after him."

"Oh, she will not allow him to see these half-pay people or to keep low company, I am sure. I will speak to him about it," said Mlle. Cormon; "he might lose his situation at the mayor's office. And then what would they do, he and his mother? It makes one shudder."

As M. de Talleyrand said of his wife, so said the chevalier within himself at that moment, as he looked at the lady—

"If there is a stupider woman, I should like to see her. On the honor of a gentleman, if virtue makes a woman so stupid as this, is it not a vice? And yet, what an adorable wife she would make for a man of my age! What principle! What ignorance of life!"

Please to bear in mind that these remarks were addressed to the Princess Goritzza during the manipulation of a pinch of snuff.

Mme. Granson felt instinctively that the chevalier was talking of Athanase. In her eagerness to know what he had been saying, she followed Mlle. Cormon, who walked up to

the young man in question, putting out six feet of dignity in front; but at that very moment Jacquelin announced that "Mademoiselle was served," and the mistress of the house shot an appealing glance at the chevalier. But the gallant registrar of mortgages was beginning to see a something in M. de Valois' manner, a glimpse of the barrier which the noblesse were about to raise between themselves and the bourgeoisie; so, delighted with a chance to cut out the chevalier, he crooked his arm, and Mlle. Cormon was obliged to take it. M. de Valois, from motives of policy, fastened upon Mme. Granson.

"Mademoiselle Cormon takes the liveliest interest in your dear Athanase, my dear lady," he said, as they slowly followed in the wake of the other guests, "but that interest is falling off through your son's fault. He is lax and Liberal in his opinions; he is agitating for this theatre; he is mixed up with the Bonapartists; he takes the part of the Constitutionnel curé. This line of conduct may cost him his situation. You know how carefully his majesty's government is weeding the service. If your dear Athanase is once cashiered, where will he find employment? He must not get into bad odor with the authorities."

"Oh, Monsieur le Chevalier," cried the poor startled mother, "what do I not owe you for telling me this! You are right; my boy is a tool in the hands of a bad set; I will open his eyes to his position."

It was long since the chevalier had sounded Athanase's character at a glance. He saw in the depths of the young man's nature the scarcely malleable material of Republican convictions; a lad at that age will sacrifice everything for such ideas if he is smitten with the word Liberty, that so vague, so little comprehended word which is like a standard of revolt for those at the bottom of the wheel for whom revolt means revenge. Athanase was sure to stick to his opinions, for he had woven them, with his artist's sorrows and his em-

bittered views of the social framework, into his political creed. He was ready to sacrifice his future at the outset for these opinions, not knowing that he, like all men of real ability, would have seen reason to modify them by the time he reached the age of six-and-thirty, when a man has formed his own conclusions of life, with its intricate relations and interdependences. If Athanase was faithful to the opposition in Alençon, he would fall into disgrace with Mlle. Cormon. Thus far the chevalier saw clearly.

And so this little town, so peaceful in appearance, was to the full as much agitated internally as any congress of diplomats, when craft and guile and passion and self-interest are met to discuss the weightiest questions between empire and empire.

Meanwhile the guests gathered about the table were eating their way through the first course as people eat in the provinces, without a blush for an honest appetite; whereas, in Paris, it would appear that our jaws are controlled by sumptuary edicts which deliberately set the laws of anatomy at defiance. We eat with the tips of our teeth in Paris, we filch the pleasures of the table, but in the provinces things are taken more naturally; possibly existence centres a little too much about the great and universal method of maintenance to which God condemns all His creatures. It was at the end of the first course that Mlle. Cormon brought out the most celebrated of all her conversational cues; it was talked of for two years afterward; it is quoted even now, indeed, in the lower bourgeois strata of Alençon whenever her marriage is under discussion. Over the last entrée but one, the conversation waxed lively and wordy, turning, as might have been expected, upon the affair of the theatre and the curé. In the first enthusiasm of royalism in 1816, those extremists, who were afterward called *les jésuites du pays*, or country jesuits, were for expelling the Abbé François from his cure. M. de Valois suspected du Bousquier of supporting the priest

and instigating the intrigues ; at any rate, the noble chevalier piled the burdens on du Bousquier's back with his wonted skill ; and du Bousquier, being unrepresented by counsel, was condemned and put in the pillory. Among those present, Athanase was the only person sufficiently frank to stand up for the absent, and he felt that he was not in a position to bring out his ideas before these Alençon magnates, of whose intellects he had the meanest opinion. Only in the provinces nowadays will you find young men keeping a respectful countenance before people of a certain age without daring to have a fling at their elders or to contradict them too flatly. To resume : On the advent of some delicious *canards aux olives*, the conversation first decidedly flagged, and then suddenly dropped dead. Mlle. Cormon, emulous of her own poultry, invented another *canard* in her anxiety to defend du Bousquier, who had been represented as an arch-concoctor of intrigue, and a man to set mountains fighting.

"For my own part," said she, "I thought that Monsieur du Bousquier gave his whole attention to childish matters."

Under the circumstances, the epigram produced a tremendous effect. Mlle. Cormon had a great success ; she brought the Princess Goritzza face downward on the table. The chevalier, by no means expecting his Dulcinea to say anything so much to the purpose, could find no words to express his admiration ; he applauded after the Italian fashion, noiselessly, with the tips of his fingers.

"She is adorably witty," he said, turning to Mme. Granson. "I have always said that she would unmask her batteries some day."

"But when you know her very well, she is charming," said the widow.

"All women, madame, have *esprit* when you know them well."

When the Homeric laughter subsided, Mlle. Cormon asked for an explanation of her success. Then the chorus of scandal

grew to a height. Du Bousquier was transformed into a bachelor Father Gigogne; it was he who filled the Foundling Hospital; the immorality of his life was laid bare at last; it was all of a piece with his Paris orgies, and so forth and so forth. Led by the Chevalier de Valois, the cleverest of conductors of this kind of orchestra, the overture was something magnificent.

"I do not know," said he, with much indulgence, "what there could possibly be to prevent a du Bousquier from marrying Mademoiselle Suzanne whatever-it-is, what do you call her? Suzette! I only know the children by sight, though I lodge with Mme. Lardot. If this Suzon is a tall, fine-looking forward sort of girl with gray eyes, a slender figure, and little feet—I have not paid much attention to these things, but she seemed to me to be very insolent and very much du Bousquier's superior in the matter of manners. Beside, Suzanne has the nobility of beauty; from that point of view, she would certainly make a marriage beneath her. The Emperor Joseph, you know, had the curiosity to go to see the du Barry at Luciennes. He offered her his arm; and when the poor courtesan, overcome by such an honor, hesitated to take it: 'Beauty is always a queen,' said the Emperor. Remark that the Emperor Joseph was an Austrian German," added the chevalier; "but, believe me, that Germany, which we think of as a very boorish country, is really a land of noble chivalry and fine manners, especially toward Poland and Hungary, where there are——" Here the chevalier broke off, fearing to make an allusion to his own happy fortune in the past; he only took up his snuff-box and confided the rest to the princess who had smiled on him for thirty-six years.

"The speech was delicately considerate for Louis XV.," said du Ronceret.

"But we are talking of the Emperor Joseph, I believe," returned Mlle. Cormon, with a knowing little air.

"Mademoiselle," said the chevalier, seeing the wicked

glances exchanged by the president, the registrar, and the notary, "Madame du Barry was Louis Quinze's Suzanne, a fact known well enough to us scapegraces, but which young ladies are not expected to know. Your ignorance shows that the diamond is flawless. The corruptions of history have not so much as touched you."

At this the Abbé de Sponde looked graciously upon M. de Valois and bent his head in laudatory approval.

"Do you not know history, mademoiselle?" asked the registrar.

"If you muddle up Louis XV. and Suzanne, how can you expect me to know your history?" was Mlle. Cormon's angelic reply. She was so pleased! The dish was empty and the conversation revived to such purpose that everybody was laughing with their mouths full at her last simple but ingenuous observation.

"Poor young thing!" said the Abbé de Sponde. "When once trouble comes, that love divine called charity is as blind as the pagan love, and should see nothing of the causes of the trouble. You are president of the Maternity Society, Rose; this child will need help; it will not be easy for her to find a husband."

"Poor child!" said Mlle. Cormon.

"Is du Bousquier going to marry her, do you suppose?" asked the president of the Tribunal.

"It would be his duty to do so if he were a decent man," said Mme. Granson; "but, really, my dog has better notions of decency——"

"And yet Azor is a great forager," put in the registrar, trying a joke this time as a change from a pun.

They were still talking of du Bousquier over the dessert. He was the butt of uncounted playful jests, which grew more and more thunder-charged under the influence of wine. Led off by the registrar, they followed up one pun with another. Du Bousquier's character was now apparent; he was not a

father of the church, nor a reverend father, nor yet a con-script father, and so on and so on, till the Abbé de Sponde said: "In any case, he is not a foster-father," with a gravity that checked the laughter.

"Nor a heavy father," added the chevalier.

The church and the aristocracy had descended into the arena of word-play without loss of dignity.

"Hush!" said the registrar, "I can hear du Bousquier's boots creaking; he is in over shoes over boots, and no mistake."

It nearly always happens that when a man's name is in every one's mouth, he is the last to hear what is said of him; the whole town may be talking of him, slandering him or crying him down, and if he has no friends to repeat what other people say of him, he is not likely to hear it. So the blameless du Bousquier, du Bousquier who would fain have been guilty, who wished that Suzanne had not lied to him, was supremely unconscious of all that was taking place. Nobody had spoken to him of Suzanne's revelations; for that matter, everybody thought it indiscreet to ask questions about the affair, when the man most concerned sometimes possesses secrets which compel him to keep silence. So when the people adjourned for coffee to the drawing-room, where several evening visitors were already assembled, du Bousquier wore an irresistible and slightly fatuous air.

Mlle. Cormon, counseled by confusion, dared not look toward the terrible seducer. She took possession of Athanase and administered a lecture, bringing out the oddest assortment of the commonplaces of Royalist doctrines and edifying truisms. As the unlucky poet had no snuff-box with a portrait of a princess on the lid to sustain him under the shower-bath of foolish utterances, it was with a vacant expression that he heard his adored lady. His eyes were fixed on that enormous bust, which maintained the absolute repose characteristic of great masses. Desire wrought a kind of intoxication in him,

The old maid's thin, shrill voice became low music for his ears; her platitudes were fraught with ideas.

Love is an utterer of false coin; he is always at work transforming common copper into gold louis; sometimes, also, he makes his seeming douzains* of fine gold.

"Well, Athanase, will you promise me?"

The final phrase struck on the young man's ear; he woke with a start from a blissful dream.

"What, mademoiselle?" returned he.

Mlle. Cormon rose abruptly and glanced across at du Bousquier. At that moment he looked like the brawny fabulous deity, whose likeness you behold upon Republican three-franc pieces. She went over to Mme. Granson and said in a confidential tone:

"Your son is weak in his intellect, my poor friend. That lyceum has been the ruin of him," she added, recollecting how the Chevalier de Valois had insisted on the bad education given in those institutions.

Here was a thunderbolt! Poor Athanase had had his chance of flinging fire upon the dried stems heaped up in the old maid's heart, and he had not known it! If he had but listened to her, he might have made her understand; for in Mlle. Cormon's present highly wrought mood a word would have been enough, but the very force of the stupefying cravings of love-sick youth had spoiled his chances; so sometimes a child full of life kills himself through ignorance.

"What can you have been saying to Mademoiselle Cormon?" asked his mother.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? I will have this cleared up," she said, and put off serious business to the morrow; du Bousquier was hopelessly lost, she thought, and the speech troubled her very little.

Soon the four card-tables received their complement of

* Old French sou.

players. Four persons sat down to piquet, the most expensive amusement of the evening, over which a good deal of money changed hands. M. Choissnel, the attorney for the crown, and a couple of ladies went to the red-lacquered cabinet for a game of tric-trac. The candles in the wall-sconces were lighted, and then the flower of Mlle. Cormon's set blossomed out about the fire, on the settees, and about the tables. Each new couple, on entering the room, made the same remark to Mlle. Cormon: "So you are going to the Prébaudet to-morrow?"

"Yes, I really must," she said, in answer to each.

All through the evening the hostess wore a preoccupied air. Mme. Granson was the first to see that she was not at all like herself. Mlle. Cormon was thinking.

"What are you thinking about, cousin?" Mme. Granson asked at last, finding her sitting in the boudoir.

"I am thinking of that poor girl. Am I not patroness of the Maternity Society? I will go now to find ten crowns for you."

"*Ten crowns!*" exclaimed Mme. Granson. "Why, you have never given so much to any one before!"

"But, my dear, it is so natural to have a child."

This improper cry from the heart struck the treasurer of the Maternity Society dumb from sheer astonishment. Du Bousquier had actually gone up in Mlle. Cormon's opinion!

"Really," began Mme. Granson, "du Bousquier is not merely a monster—he is a villain into the bargain. When a man has spoiled somebody else's life, it is his duty surely to make amends. It should be his part rather than ours to rescue this young person; and when all comes to all, she is a bad girl, it seems to me, for there are better men in Alençon than that cynic of a du Bousquier. A girl must be shameless indeed to have anything to do with him."

"Cynic? Your son, dear, teaches you Latin words that are quite beyond me. Certainly I do not want to make ex-

cuses for Monsieur du Bousquier ; but explain to me why it is immoral for a woman to prefer one man to another ? ”

“ Dear cousin, suppose now that you were to marry my Athanase ; there would be nothing but what was very natural in that. He is young and good-looking ; he has a future before him ; Alençon will be proud of him some day. But—every one would think that you took such a young man as your husband for the sake of greater conjugal felicity. Slandrous tongues would say that you were making a sufficient provision of bliss for yourself. There would be jealous women to bring charges of depravity against you. But what would it matter to you ? You would be dearly loved—loved sincerely. If Athanase seemed to you to be weak of intellect, my dear, it is because he has too many ideas. Extremes meet. He is as clean in his life as a girl of fifteen ; *he* has not wallowed in the pollutions of Paris. Well, now, change the terms, as my poor husband used to say. It is relatively just the same situation as du Bousquier’s and Suzanne’s. But what would be slander in your case is true in every way of du Bousquier. Now do you understand ? ”

“ No more than if you were talking Greek,” said Rose Cormon, opening wide eyes and exerting all the powers of her understanding.

“ Well, then, cousin, since one must put dots on all the *i*’s, it is quite out of the question that Suzanne should love du Bousquier. And when the heart counts for nothing in such an affair——”

“ Why, really, cousin, how should people love if not with their hearts ? ”

At this Mme. Granson thought within herself, as the chevalier had thought—

“ The poor cousin is too innocent by far. This goes beyond the permissible——” Aloud she said : “ Dear girl, it seems to me that a child is not conceived of spirit alone.”

“ Why, yes, dear, for the Holy Virgin——”

"But, my dear, good girl, du Bousquier is not the Holy Ghost."

"That is true," returned the spinster; "he is a man—a man dangerous enough for his friends to recommend him strongly to marry."

"You, cousin, might bring that about——"

"Oh, how?" cried the spinster, with a glow of Christian charity.

"Decline to receive him until he takes a wife. For the sake of religion and morality, you ought to make an example of him under the circumstances."

"We will talk of this again, dear Madame Granson, when I come back from the Prébaudet. I will ask advice of my uncle and the Abbé Couturier," and Mlle. Cormon went back to the large drawing-room. The liveliest hour of the evening had begun.

The lights, the groups of well-dressed women, the serious and magisterial air of the assembly, filled Mlle. Cormon with pride in the aristocratic appearance of the rooms, a pride in which her guests all shared. There were plenty of people who thought that the finest company of Paris itself was no finer. At that moment du Bousquier, playing a rubber with M. de Valois and two elderly ladies, Mme. du Coudrai and Mme. du Ronceret, was the object of suppressed curiosity. Several women came up on the pretext of watching the game, and gave him such odd, albeit furtive, glances that the old bachelor at last began to think that there must be something amiss with his appearance.

"Can it be that my toupet is askew?" he asked himself. And he felt that all-absorbing uneasiness to which the elderly bachelor is peculiarly subject. A blunder gave him an excuse for leaving the table at the end of the seventh rubber.

"I cannot touch a card but I lose," he said; "I am decidedly too unlucky at cards."

"You are lucky in other respects," said the chevalier, with

a knowing look. Naturally, the joke made the round of the room, and every one exclaimed over the exquisite breeding shown by the Prince Talleyrand of Alençon.

"There is no one like Monsieur de Valois for saying such things," said the niece of the curé of St. Leonard's.

Du Bousquier went up to the narrow mirror above The Deserter, but he could detect nothing unusual.

Toward ten o'clock, after innumerable repetitions of the same phrase with every possible variation, the long ante-chamber began to fill with visitors preparing to embark; Mlle. Cormon convoying a few favored guests as far as the steps for a farewell embrace. Knots of guests took their departure, some in the direction of the Brittany road and the château, and others turning toward the quarter by the Sarthe. And then began the exchange of remarks with which the streets had echoed at the same hour for a score of years. There was the inevitable: "Mademoiselle Cormon looked very well this evening."

"Mademoiselle Cormon? She looked strange, I thought."

"How the abbé stoops, poor man! And how he goes to sleep—did you see? He never knows where the cards are now; his mind wanders."

"We shall be very sorry to lose him."

"It is a fine night. We shall have a fine day to-morrow."

"Fine weather for the apples to set."

"You beat us to-night; you always do when Monsieur de Valois is your partner."

"Then how much did he win?"

"To-night? Why, he won three or four francs. He never loses."

"Faith, no. There are three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, you know; at that rate, whist is as good as a farm for him."

"Oh! what bad luck we had to-night!"

"You are very fortunate, monsieur and madame, here you

are at your own doorstep, while we have half the town to cross."

"I do not pity you; you could keep a gig if you liked, you need not go afoot."

"Ah! monsieur, we have a daughter to marry (that means one wheel), and a son to keep in Paris, and that takes the other."

"Are you still determined to make a magistrate of him?"

"What can one do? You must do something with a boy, and beside, it is no disgrace to serve the King."

Sometimes a discussion on cider or flax was continued on the way, the very same things being said at the same season year after year. If any observer of human nature had lived in that particular street, their conversation would have supplied him with an almanac. At this moment, however, the talk was of a decidedly Rabelaisian turn; for du Bousquier, walking on ahead by himself, was humming the well-known tune "*Femme sensible, écouter-tu le ramage?*" without a suspicion of its appropriateness. Some of the party held that du Bousquier was uncommonly long-headed, and that people judged him unjustly. President du Ronceret inclined toward this view since he had been confirmed in his post by a new royal decree. The rest regarded the forage-contractor as a dangerous man of lax morals, of whom anything might be expected. In the provinces, as in Paris, public men are very much in the position of the statue in Addison's ingenious fable. The statue was erected at a place where four roads met; two cavaliers coming up on opposite sides declared, the one that it was white, the other that it was black, until they came to blows, and both of them lying on the ground discovered that it was black on one side and white on the other, while a third cavalier coming up to their assistance affirmed that it was red.

When the Chevalier de Valois reached home, he said to himself: "It is time to spread a report that I am going to

marry Mademoiselle Cormon. The news shall come from the d'Esgrignon's salon ; it shall go straight to the bishop's palace at Sééz and come back through one of the vicars-general to the curé of St. Leonard's. He will not fail to tell the Abbé Couturier, and in this way Mademoiselle Cormon will receive the shot well under the water-line. The old Marquis d'Esgrignon is sure to ask the Abbé de Sponde to dinner to put a stop to gossip which might injure Mademoiselle Cormon if I fail to come forward ; or me, if she refuses me. The abbé shall be well and duly entangled ; and after a call from Mademoiselle de Gordes, in the course of which the grandeur and the prospects of the alliance will be put before Mademoiselle Cormon, she is not likely to hold out. The abbé will leave her more than a hundred thousand crowns ; and as for her, she must have put by more than a hundred thousand livres by this time ; she has her house, the Prébaudet, and some fifteen thousand livres per annum. One word to my friend the Comte de Fontaine, and I am Mayor of Alençon, and deputy ; then, once seated on the right-hand benches, the way to a peerage is cleared by a well-timed cry of 'Clôture,' or 'Order.' "

When Mme. Granson reached home, she had a warm explanation with her son. He could not be made to understand the connection between his political opinions and his love. It was the first quarrel which had troubled the peace of the poor little household.

Next morning, at nine o'clock, Mlle. Cormon, packed into the cariole with Josette by her side, drove up the Rue Saint-Blaise on her way to the Prébaudet, looking like a pyramid above an ocean of packages. And the event which was to surprise her there and hasten on her marriage was unseen as yet by Mme. Granson, or du Bousquier, or M. de Valois, or by Mlle. Cormon herself. Chance is the greatest artist of all.

On the morrow of mademoiselle's arrival at the Prébaudet, she was very harmlessly engaged in taking her eight-o'clock breakfast, while she listened to the reports of her bailiff and gardener, when Jacquelin, in a great flurry, burst into the dining-room.

"Mademoiselle," cried he, "Monsieur l'Abbé has sent an express messenger to you; that boy of Mother Grosmort's has come with a letter. The lad left Alençon before daybreak, and yet here he is! He came almost as fast as Penelope. Ought he to have a glass of wine?"

"What can have happened, Josette? Can uncle be——"

"He would not have written if he was," said the woman, guessing her mistress' fears.

Mlle. Cormon glanced over the first few lines.

"Quick! quick!" she cried. "Tell Jacquelin to put Penelope in. Get ready, child, have everything packed in half an hour, we are going back to town," she added, turning to Josette.

"Jacquelin!" called Josette, excited by the expression of Mlle. Cormon's face. Jacquelin on receiving his orders came back to the house to expostulate.

"But, mademoiselle, Penelope has only just been fed."

"Eh! what does that matter to me? I want to start this moment."

"But, mademoiselle, it is going to rain."

"Very well. We shall be wet through."

"The house is on fire," muttered Josette, vexed because her mistress said nothing, but read her letter through to the end, and then began again at the beginning.

"Just finish your coffee at any rate. Don't upset yourself! See how red you are in the face."

"Red in the face, Josette!" exclaimed Mlle. Cormon, going up to the mirror; and as the quick-silvered sheet had come away from the glass, she beheld her countenance doubly distorted. "Oh, dear!" she thought, "I shall look ugly!

Come, come, Josette, child, help me to dress. I want to be ready before Jacquelin puts Penelope in. If you cannot put all the things into the chaise, I would rather leave them here than lose a minute."

If you have fully comprehended the degree of monomania to which Mlle. Cormon had been driven by her desire to marry, you will share her excitement. Her worthy uncle informed her that M. de Troisville, a retired soldier from the Russian service, the grandson of one of his best friends, wishing to settle down in Alençon, had asked for his hospitality for the sake of the abbé's old friendship with the mayor, his grandfather, the Vicomte de Troisville of the reign of Louis XV. M. de Sponde, in alarm, begged his niece to come home at once to help him to entertain the guest and to do the honors of the house; for as there had been some delay in forwarding the letter, M. de Troisville might be expected to drop in upon him that very evening.

How was it possible after reading that letter to give any attention to affairs at the Prébaudet? The tenant and the bailiff, beholding their mistress' dismay, lay low and waited for orders. When they stopped her passage to ask for instructions, Mlle. Cormon, the despotic old maid, who saw to everything herself at the Prébaudet, answered them with an "As you please," which struck them dumb with amazement. This was the mistress who carried administrative zeal to such lengths that she counted the fruit and entered it under headings, so that she could regulate the consumption by the quantity of each sort!

"I must be dreaming, I think," said Josette, when she saw her mistress flying upstairs like some elephant on which God should have bestowed wings.

In a little while, in spite of the pelting rain, mademoiselle was driving away from the Prébaudet, leaving her people to have things all their own way. Jacquelin dared not take it upon himself to drive the placid Penelope any faster than her

usual jog-trot pace ; and the old mare, something like the fair queen after whom she was named, seemed to take a step back for every step forward. Beholding this, mademoiselle bade Jacquelin, in a vinegar voice, to urge the poor astonished beast to a gallop, and to use the whip if necessary, so appalling was the thought that M. de Troisville might arrive before the house was ready for him. A grandson of an old friend of her uncle's could not be much over forty, she thought ; a military man must infallibly be a bachelor. She vowed inwardly that, with her uncle's help, M. de Troisville should not depart in the estate in which he entered the Maison Cormon. Penelope galloped ; but mademoiselle, absorbed in dresses and dreams of a wedding-night, told Jacquelin again and again that he was standing still. She fidgeted in her seat, without vouchsafing any answer to Josette's questions, and talked to herself as if she was revolving mighty matters in her mind.

At last the cariole turned into the long street of Alençon, known as the Rue Saint-Blaise if you come in on the side of Mortagne, the Rue de la Porte de Séez by the time you reach the sign of the Three Moors, and lastly as the Rue du Bercaill, when it finally debouches into the highway into Brittany. If Mlle. Cormon's departure for the Prébaudet made a great noise in Alençon, anybody can imagine the hubbub caused by her return on the following day, with the driving rain lashing her face. Everybody remarked Penelope's furious pace, Jacquelin's sly looks, the earliness of the hour, the bundles piled up topsy-turvy, the lively conversation between mistress and maid, and, more than all things, the impatience of the party.

The Troisville estates lay between Alençon and Mortagne. Josette, therefore, knew about the different branches of the family. A word let fall by her mistress just as they reached the paved street of Alençon put Josette in possession of the facts, and a discussion sprang up, in the course of which the two women settled between themselves that the expected guest must be a man of forty or forty-two, a bachelor, neither rich

nor poor. Mademoiselle saw herself Vicomtesse de Troisville.

“And here is uncle telling me nothing, knowing nothing, and wanting to know nothing! Oh, so like uncle! He would forget his nose if it was not fastened to his face.”

Have you not noticed how mature spinsters, under these circumstances, grow as intelligent, fierce, bold, and full of promises as a Richard III.? To them, as to clerics in liquor, nothing is sacred.

In one moment, from the upper end of the Rue Saint-Blaise to the Porte de Séz, the town of Alençon heard of Mlle. Cormon's return with aggravating circumstances, heard with a mighty perturbation of its vitals and trouble of the organs of life public and domestic. Cook-maids, storekeepers, and passers-by carried the news from door to door, then, without delay, it circulated in the upper spheres, and almost simultaneously the words: “Mademoiselle Cormon has come back,” exploded like a bomb in every house.

Meanwhile Jacquelin climbed down from his wooden bench in front, polished by some process unknown to cabinet-makers, and with his own hands opened the great gates with the rounded tops. They were closed in Mlle. Cormon's absence as a sign of mourning; for when she went away her house was shut up, and the faithful took it in turn to show hospitality to the Abbé de Sponde. (M. de Valois used to pay his debt by an invitation to dine at the Marquis d'Esgrignon's.) Jacquelin gave the familiar call to Penelope standing in the middle of the road; and the animal, accustomed to this manœuvre, turned into the courtyard, steering clear of the flower-bed, till Jacquelin took the bridle and walked round with the chaise to the steps before the door.

“Mariette!” called Mlle. Cormon.

“Mademoiselle?” returned Mariette, engaged in shutting the gates.

“Has the gentleman come?”

"No, mademoiselle."

"And is my uncle here?"

"He is at the church, mademoiselle."

Jacquelin and Josette were standing on the lowest step of the flight, holding out their hands to steady their mistress' descent from the cariole; she, meanwhile, had hoisted herself upon the shaft, and was clutching at the curtains, before springing down into their arms. It was two years since she had dared to trust herself upon the iron step of double strength, secured to the shaft by a fearfully made contrivance with huge bolts.

From the height of the steps, mademoiselle surveyed her courtyard with an air of satisfaction.

"There, there, Mariette, let the great gate alone and come here."

"There is something up," Jacquelin said to Mariette as she came past the chaise.

"Let us see now, child, what is there in the house?" said Mlle. Cormon, collapsing on the bench in the long ante-chamber as if she were exhausted.

"Just nothing at all," replied Mariette, hands on hips. "Mademoiselle knows quite well that Monsieur l'Abbé always dines out when she is not at home; yesterday I went to bring him back from Mademoiselle Armande's."

"Then where is he?"

"Monsieur l'Abbé? He is gone to church; he will not be back till three o'clock."

"Uncle thinks of nothing! Why couldn't he have sent you to market? Go down now, Mariette, and, without throwing money away, spare for nothing, get the best, finest, and daintiest of everything. Go to the coach office and ask where people send orders for pâtés. And I want cray-fish from the brooks along the Brillante. What time is it?"

"Nine o'clock all but a quarter."

"Oh dear, oh dear; don't lose any time in chattering,

Mariette. The visitor my uncle is expecting may come at any moment; pretty figures we should cut if he comes to breakfast."

Mariette, turning round, saw Penelope in a lather, and gave Jacquelin a glance which said: "Mademoiselle means to put her hand on a husband this time."

Mlle. Cormon turned to her housemaid. "Now, it is our turn, Josette; we must make arrangements for Monsieur de Troisville to sleep here to-night."

How gladly those words were uttered! "We must arrange for Monsieur de Troisville" (pronounced Tréville) "to sleep here to-night!" How much lay in those few words! Hope poured like a flood through the old maid's soul.

"Will you put him in the green chamber?"

"The bishop's room? No," said mademoiselle, "it is too near mine. It is very well for his lordship, a holy man."

"Give him your uncle's room."

"It looks so bare; it would not do."

"Lord, mademoiselle, you could have a bed put up in the boudoir in a brace of shakes; there is a fireplace there. Moreau will be sure to find a bedstead in his warehouse that will match the hangings as nearly as possible."

"You are right, Josette. Very well; run round to Moreau's and ask his advice about everything necessary; I give you authority. If the bed, Monsieur de Troisville's bed, can be set up by this evening, so that Monsieur de Troisville shall notice nothing, supposing that Monsieur de Troisville should happen to come in while Moreau is here, I am quite willing. If Moreau cannot promise that, Monsieur de Troisville shall sleep in the green chamber, although Monsieur de Troisville will be very near me."

Josette departed; her mistress called her back.

"Tell Jacquelin all about it," she exclaimed in a stern and awful voice; "let *him* go to Moreau. How about my dress? Suppose Monsieur de Troisville came and caught me like

this, without uncle here to receive him ! Oh, uncle ! uncle ! Come, Josette, you shall help me to dress."

"But how about Penelope?" the woman began imprudently. Mlle. Cormon's eyes shot sparks for the first and last time in her life.

"It is always Penelope ! Penelope this, Penelope that ! Is Penelope mistress here?"

"She is all of a lather, and she has not been fed."

"Eh ! and if she dies, let her die——" cried Mlle. Cormon—"so long as I am married," she added in her own mind.

Josette stood stockstill a moment in amazement, such a remark was tantamount to murder ; then, at a sign from her mistress, she dashed headlong down the steps into the yard.

"Mademoiselle is possessed, Jacquelin !" were Josette's first words.

And in this way, everything that occurred throughout the day led up to the great climax which was to change the whole course of Mlle. Cormon's life. The town was already turned upside down by five aggravating circumstances which attended the lady's sudden return, to wit—the pouring rain ; Penelope's panting pace and sunk flanks covered with foam ; the earliness of the hour ; the untidy bundles ; and the spinster's strange, scared looks. But when Mariette invaded the market to carry off everything that she could lay her hands on ; when Jacquelin went to inquire for a bedstead of the principal upholsterer in the Rue Porte de Séz, close by the church ; here, indeed, was material on which to build the gravest conjecture ! The strange event was discussed on the parade and the promenade ; every one was full of it, not excepting Mlle. Armande, on whom the Chevalier de Valois happened to be calling at the time.

Only two days ago Alençon had been stirred to its depths by occurrences of such capital importance that worthy matrons

were still exclaiming that it was like the end of the world ! And now, this last news was summed up in all houses by the inquiry :

“ What can be happening at the Cormons' ? ”

The Abbé de Sponde, skillfully questioned when he emerged from St. Leonard's to take a walk with the Abbé Couturier along the parade, made reply in the simplicity of his heart, to the effect that he expected a visit from the Vicomte de Troisville, who had been in the Russian service during the Emigration, and now was coming back to settle in Alençon. A kind of labial telegraph, at work that afternoon between two and five o'clock, informed all the inhabitants of Alençon that Mlle. Cormon at last had found herself a husband by advertisement. She was going to marry the Vicomte de Troisville. Some said that “ Moreau was at work on a bedstead already.” In some places the bed was six feet long. It was only four feet at Mme. Granson's house in the Rue du Bercail. At President du Ronceret's, where du Bousquier was dining, it dwindled into a sofa. The tradespeople said that it cost eleven hundred francs. It was generally thought that this was like counting your chickens before they were hatched.

Farther away, it was said that the price of carp had gone up. Mariette had swooped down upon the market and created a general scarcity. Penelope had dropped down at the upper end of the Rue Saint-Blaise ; the death was called in question at the receiver-general's ; nevertheless, at the prefecture it was known for a fact that the animal fell dead just as she turned in at the gate of the Hôtel Cormon, so swiftly had the old maid come down upon her prey. The saddler at the corner of the Rue de Sééz, in his anxiety to know the truth about Penelope, was hardy enough to call in to ask if anything had happened to Mlle. Cormon's chaise. Then from the utmost end of the Rue Saint-Blaise to the furthestmost parts of the Rue du Bercail, it was known that, thanks to Jacquelin's care,

Penelope, dumb victim of her mistress' intemperate haste, was still alive, but she seemed to be in a bad way.

All along the Brittany road the Vicomte de Troisville was a penniless younger son, for the domains of Perche belonged to the marquis of that ilk, a peer of France with two children. The match was a lucky thing for an impoverished *émigré*; as for the vicomte himself, that was Mlle. Cormon's affair. Altogether the match received the approval of the aristocratic section on the Brittany road; Mlle. Cormon could not have put her fortune to a better use.

Among the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, the Vicomte de Troisville was a Russian general that had borne arms against France. He was bringing back a large fortune made at the court of St. Petersburg. He was a "foreigner," one of the "Allies" detested by the Liberals. The Abbé de Sponde had manœuvred the match on the sly. Every person who had any shadow of a right of entrance to Mlle. Cormon's drawing-room vowed to be there that night.

While the excitement went through the town, and all but put Suzanne out of people's heads, Mlle. Cormon herself was not less excited; she felt as she had never felt before. She looked round the drawing-room, the boudoir, the cabinet, the dining-room, and a dreadful apprehension seized upon her. Some mocking demon seemed to show her the old-fashioned splendor in a new light; the beautiful furniture, admired ever since she was a child, was suspected, nay, convicted, of being out of date. She was shaken, in fact, by the dread that catches almost every author by the throat when he begins to read his own work aloud to some exigent or jaded critic. Before he began, it was perfect in his eyes; now the novel situations are stale; the finest periods turned with such secret relish are turgid or halting; the metaphors are mixed or grotesque; his sins stare him in the face. Even so, poor Mlle. Cormon shivered to think of the smile on M. de Troisville's lips when he looked round that salon, which looked

like a bishop's drawing-room, unchanged for one possessor after another. She dreaded his cool survey of the ancient dining-room; in short, she was afraid that the picture might look the older for the ancient frame. How if all these old things should tinge her with their age? The bare thought of it made her flesh creep. At that moment she would have given one-fourth of her savings for the power of renovating her house at a stroke of a magic wand. Where is the general so conceited that he will not shudder on the eve of an action? She, poor thing, was between an Austerlitz and a Waterloo.

"Madame la Vicomtesse de Troisville," she said to herself, "what a fine name! Our estates will pass to a good house, at any rate."

Her excitement fretted her. It sent a thrill through every fibre of every nerve to the least of the ramifications and the papillæ so well wadded with flesh. Hope tingling in her veins set all the blood in her body in circulation. She felt capable, if need was, of conversing with M. de Troisville.

Of the activity with which Josette, Mariette, Jacquelin, Moreau, and his assistants set about their work, it is needless to speak. Ants rescuing their eggs could not have been busier than they. Everything, kept so neat and clean with daily care, was starched and ironed, scrubbed, washed, and polished. The best china saw the light. Linen damask cloths and serviettes docketed A B C D emerged from the depths where they lay shrouded in triple wrappings and defended by bristling rows of pins. The rarest shelves of that oak-bound library were made to give account of their contents; and finally, mademoiselle offered up three bottles of liqueurs to the coming guest, three bottles bearing the label of the most famous distiller of over-sea—Mme. Amphoux, name dear to connoisseurs.

Mlle. Cormon was ready for battle, thanks to the devotion of her lieutenants. The munitions of war, the heavy artillery

of the kitchen, the batteries of the pantry, the victuals, provisions for the attack, and body of (p)reserves, had all been brought up in array. Orders were issued to Jacquelin, Mariette, and Josette to wear their best clothes. The garden was raked over. Mademoiselle only regretted that she could not come to an understanding with the nightingales in the trees, that they might warble their sweetest songs for the occasion. At length, at four o'clock, just as the abbé came in, and mademoiselle was beginning to think that she had brought out her daintiest linen and china and made ready the most exquisite of dinners in vain, the crack of a postillion's whip sounded outside in the Val-Noble.

"It is *he!*" she thought, and the lash of the whip struck her in the heart.

And indeed, heralded by all this tittle-tattle, a certain post-chaise, with a single gentleman inside it, had made such a prodigious sensation as it drove down the Rue Saint-Blaise and turned into the Rue du Cours, that several small urchins and older persons gave chase to the vehicle, and now were standing in a group about the gateway of the Hôtel Cormon to watch the postillion drive in. Jacquelin, feeling that his own marriage was in the wind, had also heard the crack of the whip, and was out in the yard to throw open the gates. The postillion (an acquaintance) was on his mettle, he turned the corner to admiration, and came to a stand before the flight of steps. And, as you can understand, he did not go until Jacquelin had duly and properly made him tipsy.

The abbé came out to meet his guest, and in a trice the chaise was despoiled of its occupant, robbers in a hurry could not have done their work more nimbly; then the chaise was put into the coach-house, the great door was closed, and in a few minutes there was not a sign of M. de Troisville's arrival. Never did two chemicals combine with a greater alacrity than that displayed by the house of Cormon to absorb the Vicomte de Troisville. As for mademoiselle, if she had been a lizard

caught by a shepherd, her heart could not have beat faster. She sat heroically in her low chair by the fireside; Josette threw open the door, and the Vicomte de Troisville, followed by the Abbé de Sponde, appeared before her.

"This is Monsieur le Vicomte de Troisville, niece, a grandson of an old schoolfellow of mine. Monsieur de Troisville, my niece, Mademoiselle Cormon."

"Dear uncle, how nicely he puts it," thought Rose-Marie-Victoire.

The Vicomte de Troisville, to describe him in a few words, was a du Bousquier of noble family. Between the two men there was just that difference which separates the gentleman from the ordinary man. If they had been standing side by side, even the most furious Radical could not have denied the signs of race about the vicomte. There was all the distinction of refinement about his strength, his figure had lost nothing of its magnificent dignity. Blue-eyed, dark-haired, and olive-skinned, he could not have been more than six-and-forty. You might have thought him a handsome Spaniard preserved in Russian ice. His manner, gait, and bearing, and everything about him, suggested a diplomatist, and one that has seen Europe. He looked like a gentleman in his traveling dress.

M. de Troisville seemed to be tired. The abbé rose to conduct him to his room, and was overcome with astonishment when Rose opened the door of the boudoir, now transformed into a bedroom. Then uncle and niece left the noble visitor leisure to attend to his toilet with the help of Jacquelin, who brought him all the luggage which he needed. While M. de Troisville was dressing, they walked on the terrace by the Brillante. The abbé, by a strange chance, was more absent-minded than usual, and Mlle. Cormon no less preoccupied, so they paced to and fro in silence. Never in her life had Mlle. Cormon seen so attractive a man as this Olympian vicomte. She could not say to herself, like a German girl,

"I have found my Ideal!" but she felt that she was in love from head to foot. "The very thing for me," she thought. On a sudden she fled to Mariette, to know whether dinner could be put back a little without serious injury.

"Uncle, this Monsieur de Troisville is very pleasant," she said when she came back again.

"Why, my girl, he has not said a word as yet," returned the abbé, laughing.

"But one can tell by his general appearance. Is he a bachelor?"

"I know nothing about it," replied her uncle, his thoughts full of that afternoon's discussion with the Abbé Couturier on Divine Grace. "Monsieur de Troisville said in his letter that he wanted to buy a house here. If he were married, he would not have come alone," he added carelessly. It never entered his head that his niece could think of marriage for herself.

"Is he rich?"

"He is the younger son of a younger branch. His grandfather held a major's commission, but this young man's father made a foolish marriage."

"Young man!" repeated his niece. "Why, he is quite five-and-forty, uncle, it seems to me." She felt an uncontrollable desire to compare his age with hers.

"Yes," said the abbé. "But to a poor priest at seventy, a man of forty seems young, Rose."

By this time all Alençon knew that M. le Vicomte de Troisville had arrived at the Cormon house.

The visitor very soon rejoined his host and hostess, and began to admire the Brillante, the garden, the house, and surroundings.

"Monsieur l'Abbé," he said, "to find such a place as this would be the height of my ambition."

The old maid wished to read a declaration in the speech. She lowered her eyes.

"You must be very fond of it, mademoiselle," continued the vicomte.

"How could I help being fond of it? It has been in our family since 1574, when one of our ancestors, an Intendant of the Duchy of Alençon, bought the ground and built the house. It is laid on piles."

Jacquelin having announced that dinner was ready, M. de Troisville offered his arm. The radiant spinster tried not to lean too heavily upon him; she was still afraid that he might think her forward.

"Everything is quite in harmony here," remarked the vicomte as they sat down to table.

"Yes, the trees in our garden are full of birds that give us music for nothing. Nobody molests them; the nightingales sing there every night," said Mlle. Cormon.

"I am speaking of the inside of the house," remarked the vicomte; he had not troubled himself to study his hostess particularly, and was quite unaware of her vacuity. "Yes, everything contributes to the general effect; the tones of color, the furniture, the character of the house," added he, addressing Mlle. Cormon.

"It costs a great deal, though," replied that excellent spinster, "the taxes are something enormous." The word "contribute" had impressed itself on her mind.

"Ah! then are the taxes high here?" asked Monsieur de Troisville, too full of his own ideas to notice the absurd *non sequitur*.

"I do not know," said the abbé. "My niece manages her own property and mine."

"The taxes are a mere trifle if people are well to do," struck in Mlle. Cormon, anxious not to appear stingy. "As to the furniture, I leave things as they are. I shall never make any changes here; at least I shall not, unless I marry, and in that case everything in the house must be arranged to suit the master's taste."

"You are for great principles, mademoiselle," smiled the vicomte; "somebody will be a lucky man."

"Nobody ever made me such a pretty speech before," thought Mlle. Cormon.

The vicomte complimented his hostess upon the appointments of the table and the housekeeping, admitting that he had thought that the provinces were behind the times, and found himself in most delectable quarters.

"*Delectable*, good Lord! what does it mean?" thought she. "Where is the Chevalier de Valois to reply to him? De-lect-able? Is it made up of several words? There! courage; perhaps it is Russian, and if so I am not obliged to say anything." Then she added aloud, her tongue loosed by an eloquence which almost every human creature can find in a great crisis, "We have the most brilliant society here, Monsieur le Vicomte. You will be able to judge for yourself, for it assembles in this very house; on some of our acquaintances we can always count; they will have heard of my return no doubt, and will be sure to come to see me. There is the Chevalier de Valois, a gentleman of the old court, a man of infinite wit and taste; then there is Monsieur le Marquis d'Esgrignon and Mademoiselle Armande, his sister"—she bit her lip and changed her mind—"a—a remarkable woman in her way. She refused all offers of marriage so as to leave her fortune to her brother and his son."

"Ah! yes; the d'Esgrignons, I remember them," said the vicomte.

"Alençon is very gay," pursued mademoiselle, now that she had fairly started off. "There is so much going on; the receiver-general gives dances; the prefect is a very pleasant man; his lordship the bishop occasionally honors us with a visit——"

"Come!" said the vicomte, smiling as he spoke, "I have done well, it seems, to come creeping back like a hare (*un lièvre*) to die in my form."

"It is the same with me," replied mademoiselle; "I am like a creeper (*le lierre*), I must cling to something or die."

The vicomte took the saying thus twisted for a joke, and smiled.

"Ah!" thought his hostess, "that is all right, *he* understands me."

The conversation was kept up upon generalities. Under pressure of a strong desire to please, the strange, mysterious, indefinable workings of consciousness brought all the Chevalier de Valois' tricks of speech uppermost in Mlle. Cormon's brain. It fell out, as it sometimes does in a duel, when the devil himself seems to take aim; and never did duelist hit his man more fairly and squarely than the old maid. The Vicomte de Troisville was too well mannered to praise the excellent dinner, but his silence was panegyric in itself! As he drank the delicious wines with which Jacquelin plied him, he seemed to be meeting old friends with the liveliest pleasure; for your true amateur does not applaud, he enjoys. He informed himself curiously of the prices of land, houses, and sites; he drew from mademoiselle a long description of the property between the Brillante and the Sarthe. He was amazed that the town and the river lay so far apart, and showed the greatest interest in local topography. The abbé sat silent, leaving all the conversation to his niece. And, in truth, mademoiselle considered that she interested M. de Troisville; he smiled graciously at her, he made far more progress with her in the course of a single dinner than the most ardent of her former wooers in a whole fortnight. For which reasons, you may be certain that never was guest so cosseted, so lapped about with small attentions and observances. He might have been a much-loved lover, newly come home to the house of which he was the delight.

Mademoiselle forestalled his wants. She saw when he needed bread, her eyes brooded over him; if he turned his head, she adroitly supplemented his portion of any dish which

he seemed to like; if he had been a glutton, she would have killed him. What a delicious earnest of all that she counted upon doing for her lover! She made no silly blunders of self-depreciation this time! She went gallantly forward, full sail, and all flags flying; posed as the queen of Alençon, and vaunted her preserves. Indeed, she fished for compliments, talking about herself as if her trumpeter were dead. And she saw that she pleased the vicomte, for her wish to please had so transformed her that she grew almost feminine. It was not without inward exultation that she heard footsteps while they sat at dessert; sounds of going and coming in the antechamber and noises in the salon; and knew that the usual company was arriving. She called the attention of her uncle and M. de Troisville to this fact as a proof of the affection in which she was held, whereas it really was a symptom of the paroxysm of curiosity which convulsed the whole town. Impatient to show herself in her glory, she ordered coffee and the liqueurs to be taken to the salon, whither Jacquelin went to display to the élite of Alençon the splendors of a Dresden china service, which only left the cupboard twice in a twelvemonth. All these circumstances were noted by people disposed to criticise under their breath.

"Egad!" cried du Bousquier, "nothing but Madame Amphoux's liqueurs, which only come out on the four great festival days!"

"Decidedly, this match must have been arranged by correspondence for a year past," said M. le Président du Ronceret. "The postmaster here has been receiving letters with an Odessa postmark for the last twelve months."

Mme. Granson shuddered. M. le Chevalier de Valois had eaten a heavy dinner, but he felt the pallor spreading over his left cheek; felt, too, that he was betraying his secret, and said: "It is cold to-day, do you not think? I am freezing."

"It is the neighborhood of Russia," suggested du Bousquier.

And the chevalier looked at his rival as who should say: "Well put in!"

Mlle. Cormon was so radiant, so triumphant, that she looked positively handsome, it was thought. Nor was this unwonted brilliancy wholly due to sentiment; ever since the morning the blood had been surging through her veins; the presentiments of a great crisis at hand affected her nerves. It needed a combination of circumstances to make her so little like herself. With what joy did she not solemnly introduce the vicomte to the chevalier, and the chevalier to the vicomte; all Alençon was presented to M. de Troisville, and M. de Troisville made the acquaintance of all Alençon. It fell out, naturally enough, that the vicomte and the chevalier, two born aristocrats, were in sympathy at once; they recognized each other for inhabitants of the same social sphere. They began to chat as they stood by the fire. A circle formed about them listening devoutly to their conversation, though it was carried on *sotto voce*. Fully to realize the scene, imagine Mlle. Cormon standing with her back to the chimney-piece, busy preparing coffee for her supposed suitor.

M. DE VALOIS. "So Monsieur le Vicomte is coming to settle here, people say."

M. DE TROISVILLE. "Yes, monsieur. I have come to look for a house." (*Mlle. Cormon turns, cup in hand.*) "And I must have a large one"—(*Mlle. Cormon offers the cup of coffee*)—"to hold my family." (*The room grows dark before the old maid's eyes.*)

M. DE VALOIS. "Are you married?"

M. DE TROISVILLE. "Yes, I have been married for sixteen years. My wife is the daughter of the Princess Scherbelloff."

Mlle. Cormon dropped like one thunderstruck. Du Bousquier, seeing her reel, sprang forward, and caught her in his arms. Somebody opened the door to let him pass out with his enormous burden. The melted Republican, counseled by Josette, summoned up his strength, bore the old maid to her

room, and deposited her upon the bed. Josette, armed with a pair of scissors, cut the stay-laces, drawn outrageously tight. Du Bousquier, rough and ready, dashed cold water over Mlle. Cormon's face and bust, which broke from its bounds like the Loire in flood. The patient opened her eyes, saw du Bousquier, and gave a cry of alarmed modesty. Du Bousquier withdrew, leaving half-a-dozen women in possession, with Mme. Granson at their head, Mme. Granson beaming with joy.

What had the Chevalier de Valois done? True to his system, he had been covering the retreat.

"Poor Mademoiselle Cormon!" he said, addressing M. de Troisville, but looking round the room, quelling the beginnings of an outbreak of laughter with his haughty eyes. "She is dreadfully troubled with heated blood. She would not be bled before going to the Prébaudet (her country house), and this is the result of the spring weather."

"She drove over in the rain this morning," said the Abbé de Sponde. "She may have taken a little cold, and so caused the slight derangement of the system to which she is subject. But she will soon get over it."

"She was telling me the day before yesterday that she had not had a recurrence of it for three months; she added at the time that it was sure to play her a bad turn," added the chevalier.

"Ah! so you are married!" thought Jacquelin, watching M. de Troisville, who was sipping his coffee.

The faithful manservant made his mistress' disappointment his own. He guessed her feelings. He took away the liqueurs brought out for a bachelor, and not for a Russian woman's husband. All these little things were noticed with amusement.

The Abbé de Sponde had known all along why M. de Troisville had come to Alençon, but in his absent-mindedness he had said nothing about it; it had never entered his mind that his niece could take the slightest interest in that gentleman.

As for the vicomte, he was engrossed by the object of his journey; like many other married men, he was in no great hurry to introduce his wife into the conversation; he had had no opportunity of saying that he was married; and beside, he thought that Mlle. Cormon knew his history. Du Bousquier reappeared, and was questioned without mercy. One of the six women came down, and reported that Mlle. Cormon was feeling much better, and that her doctor had come; but she was to stay in bed, and it appeared that she ought to be bled at once. The salon soon filled. In Mlle. Cormon's absence, the ladies were free to discuss the tragic-comic scene which had just taken place; and duly they enlarged, annotated, embellished, colored, adorned, embroidered, and bedizened the tale which was to set all Alençon thinking of the disappointed old maid on the morrow.

Meanwhile, Josette upstairs was saying to her mistress, "That good Monsieur du Bousquier! How he carried you upstairs! What a fist! Really, your illness made him quite pale. He loves you still."

And with this final phrase, the solemn and terrible day came to a close.

Next day, all morning long, the news of the comedy, with full details, circulated over Alençon, raising laughter everywhere, to the shame of the town be it said. Next day, Mlle. Cormon, very much the better for the blood-letting, would have seemed sublime to the most hardened of those who jeered at her, if they could but have seen her noble dignity and the Christian resignation in her soul, as she gave her hand to the unconscious perpetrator of the hoax, and went in to breakfast. Ah! heartless wags, who were laughing at her expense, why could you not hear her say to the vicomte—

"Madame de Troisville will have some difficulty in finding a house to suit her. Do me the favor of using my house, monsieur, until you have made all your arrangements."

"But I have two girls and two boys, mademoiselle. We should put you to a great deal of inconvenience."

"Do not refuse me," said she, her eyes full of apprehension and regret.

"I made the offer, however you might decide, in my letter; but you did not take it," remarked the abbé.

"What, uncle! did you know?—"

Poor thing, she broke off. Josette heaved a sigh, and neither M. de Troisville nor the uncle noticed anything.

After breakfast, the Abbé de Sponde, carrying out the plan agreed upon over night, took the vicomte to see houses for sale and suitable sites for building. Mlle. Cormon was left alone in the salon.

"I am the talk of the town, child, by this time," she said, looking piteously at Josette.

"Well, mademoiselle, get married."

"But, my girl, I am not at all prepared to make a choice."

"Bah! I should take Monsieur du Bousquier if I were you."

"Monsieur de Valois says that he is such a Republican, Josette."

"Your gentlemen don't know what they are talking about; they say that he robbed the Republic, so he can't have been at all fond of it," said Josette, and with that she went.

"That girl is amazingly shrewd," thought Mlle. Cormon, left alone to her gnawing perplexity.

She saw that the only way of silencing talk was to marry at once. This last so patently humiliating check was enough to drive her to extreme measures; and it takes a great deal to force a feeble-minded human being out of a groove, be it good or bad. Both the old bachelors understood the position of affairs, both made up their minds to call in the morning to make inquiries, and (in their own language) to press the point.

M. de Valois considered that the occasion demanded a

scrupulous toilet ; he took a bath, he groomed himself with unusual care, and for the first time and the last Césarine saw him applying “a suspicion of rouge” with incredible skill.

Du Bousquier, rough and ready Republican that he was, inspired by dogged purpose, paid no attention to his appearance, he hurried round, and came in first. The fate of men, like the destinies of empires, hangs on small things. History records all such principal causes of great failure or success—a Kellermann’s charge at Marengo, a Blücher coming up at the battle of Waterloo, a Prince Eugène slighted by Louis XIV., a curé on the battlefield of Denain ; but nobody profits by the lesson to be diligently attentive to the little trifles of his own life. Behold the results. The Duchesse de Langeais in “The Thirteen” entering a convent for want of ten minutes’ patience ; Judge Popinot in “The Commission in Lunacy” putting off his inquiries as to the Marquis d’Espard till to-morrow ; Charles Grandet coming home by way of Bordeaux instead of Nantes—and these things are said to happen by accident and mere chance ! The few moments spent in putting on that suspicion of rouge wrecked M. de Valois’ hopes. Only in such a way could the chevalier have succumbed. He had lived for the Graces, he was foredoomed to die through them. Even as he gave a last look in the mirror, the burly du Bousquier was entering the disconsolate old maid’s drawing-room. His entrance coincided with a gleam of favor in the lady’s mind, though in the course of her deliberations the chevalier had decidedly had the advantage.

“It is God’s will,” she said to herself when du Bousquier appeared.

“Mademoiselle, I trust you will not take my importunity in bad part ; I did not like to trust that great stupid of a René to make inquiries, and came myself.”

“I am perfectly well,” she said nervously ; then, after a

pause, and in a very emphatic tone, "Thank you, Monsieur du Bousquier, for the trouble that you took and that I gave you yesterday——"

She recollected how she had lain in du Bousquier's arms, and the accident seemed to her to be a direct order from heaven. For the first time in her life a man had seen her with her belt wrenched apart, her stay-laces cut, the jewel shaken violently out of its case.

"I was so heartily glad to carry you that I thought you a light weight," said he.

At this Mlle. Cormon looked at du Bousquier as she never looked at any man in the world before; and thus encouraged, the ex-contractor for forage flung a side-glance that went straight to the old maid's heart.

"It is a pity," added he, "that this has not given me the right to keep you always." (She was listening with rapture in her face.) "You looked dazzling as you lay swooning there on the bed; I never saw such a fine woman in my life, and I have seen a good many. There is this about a stout woman, she is superb to look at, she has only to show herself, she triumphs."

"You mean to laugh at me," said the old maid; "that is not kind of you, when the whole town is perhaps putting a malicious and bad construction on things that happened here yesterday."

"It is as true as that my name is du Bousquier, mademoiselle. My feelings toward you have never changed; your first rejection did not discourage me."

The old maid lowered her eyes. There was a pause, a painful ordeal for du Bousquier. Then Mlle. Cormon made up her mind and raised her eyelids; she looked up tenderly at du Bousquier through her tears.

"If this is so, monsieur," she said, in a tremulous voice, "I only ask you to allow me to lead a Christian life, do not ask me to change any of my habits as to religion, leave me free to

choose my spiritual directors, and I will give you my hand," holding it out to him as she spoke.

Du Bousquier caught the plump, honest hand that held so many francs, and kissed it respectfully.

"But I have one thing more to ask," added Mlle. Cormon, suffering him to kiss her hand.

"It is granted, and if it is impossible, it shall be done" (a reminiscence of Beaujon).

"Alas!" began the old maid, "for love of me you must burden your soul with a sin which I know is heinous; falsehood is one of the seven deadly sins; but still you can make confession, can you not? We will both of us do penance." They looked tenderly at each other at those words.

"Perhaps," continued Mlle. Cormon, "after all, it is one of those deceptions which the church calls venial——"

"Is she going to tell me that she is in Suzanne's plight?" thought du Bousquier. "What luck!——" Aloud he said, "Well, mademoiselle?"

"And you must take it upon you——"

"What?"

"To say that this marriage was agreed upon between us six months ago."

"Charming woman!" exclaimed the forage-contractor, and by his manner he implied that he was prepared to make even this sacrifice; "a man only does thus for the woman he has worshiped for ten years."

"In spite of my severity?" asked she.

"Yes, in spite of your severity."

"Monsieur du Bousquier, I have misjudged you." Again she held out her big, red hand, and again du Bousquier kissed it.

At that very moment the door opened, and the betrothed couple, turning their heads, perceived the charming but too tardy chevalier.

"Ah! fair queen," said he, "so you have risen?"

Mlle. Cormon smiled at him, and something clutched at her heart. M. de Valois, grown remarkably young and irresistible, looked like Lauzun entering La Grande Mademoiselle's apartments.

"Ah! my dear du Bousquier!" he continued, half laughingly, so sure was he of success. "Monsieur de Troisville and the Abbé de Sponde are in front of your house, looking it over like a pair of surveyors."

"On my word," said du Bousquier, "if the Vicomte de Troisville wants it, he can have it for forty thousand francs. It is of no use whatever to me. Always, if mademoiselle has no objection, that must be ascertained first. Mademoiselle, may I tell? Yes? Very well, *my dear chevalier*, you shall be the first to hear"—Mlle. Cormon dropped her eyes—"of the honor and the favor that mademoiselle is doing me; I have kept it a secret for more than six months. We are going to be married in a very few days, the contract is drawn up, we shall sign it to-morrow. So, you see, that I have no further use for my house in the Rue du Cygne. I am quietly on the lookout for a purchaser; and the Abbé de Sponde, *who knew this*, naturally took Monsieur du Troisville to see it."

There was such a color of truth about this monstrous fib that the chevalier was quite taken in by it. *My dear chevalier* was a return for all preceding defeats; it was like the victory won at Pultowa by Peter the Great over Charles XII. And thus du Bousquier enjoyed a delicious revenge for hundreds of pin-pricks endured in silence; but in his triumph he forgot that he was not a young man, he passed his fingers through the false toupet, and—it came off in his hand!

"I congratulate you both," said the chevalier, with an agreeable smile; "I wish that you may end like the fairy stories, 'They lived very happily and had a fine—*family of children!*'" Here he shaped a cone of snuff in his palm before adding mockingly, "But, monsieur, you forgot that—er—you wear borrowed plumes."

Du Bousquier reddened. The false toupet was ten inches awry. Mlle. Cormon raised her eyes to the face of her betrothed, saw the bare cranium, and bashfully looked down again. Never toad looked more venomously at a victim than du Bousquier at the chevalier.

"A pack of aristocrats that look down on me!" he thought. "I will crush you all some of these days."

The Chevalier de Valois imagined that he had regained all the lost ground. But Mlle. Cormon was not the woman to understand the connection between the chevalier's congratulation and the allusion to the false toupet; and, for that matter, even if she had understood, her hand had been given. M. de Valois saw too clearly that all was lost. Meantime, as the two men stood without speaking, Mlle. Cormon innocently studied how to amuse them.

"Play a game of reversis," suggested she, without any malicious intention.

Du Bousquier smiled, and went as future master of the house for the card-table. Whether the Chevalier de Valois had lost his head, or whether he chose to remain to study the causes of his defeat and to remedy it, certain it is that he allowed himself to be led like a sheep to the slaughter. But he had just received the heaviest of all bludgeon blows; and a noble might have been excused if he had been at any rate stunned by it. Very soon the worthy Abbé de Sponde and M. de Troisville returned, and at once Mlle. Cormon hurried into the antechamber, took her uncle aside, and told him in a whisper of her decision. Then, hearing that the house in the Rue du Cygne suited M. de Troisville, she begged her betrothed to do her the service of saying that her uncle knew that the place was for sale. She dared not confide the fib to the abbé, for fear that he should forget. The falsehood was destined to prosper better than if it had been a virtuous action. All Alençon heard the great news that night. For four days the town had found as much to say as in the ominous days of

1814 and 1815. Some laughed at the idea, others thought it true; some condemned, others approved the marriage. The bourgeoisie of Alençon regarded it as a conquest, and they were the best pleased.

The Chevalier de Valois, next day, among his own circle, brought out this cruel epigram: "The Cormons are ending as they began; stewards and contractors are all on a footing."

The news of Mlle. Cormon's choice went to poor Athanase's heart; but he showed not a sign of the dreadful tumult surging within. He had heard of the marriage at President du Ronceret's while his mother was playing a game of boston. Mme. Granson, looking up, saw her son's face in the glass; he looked white, she thought, but then he had been pale ever since vague rumors had reached him in the morning. Mlle. Cormon was the card on which Athanase staked his life, and chill presentiments of impending catastrophe already wrapped him about. When intellect and imagination have exaggerated a calamity till it becomes a burden too heavy for shoulders and brow to bear, when some long-cherished hope fails utterly, and with it the visions which enable a man to forget the fierce vulture-cares gnawing at his heart; then, if that man has no belief in himself, in spite of his powers; no belief in the future, in spite of the Power Divine—he is broken in pieces. Athanase was a product of education under the Empire. Fatalism, the Emperor's creed, spread downward to the lowest ranks of the army, to the very schoolboys at their desks. Athanase followed Mme. du Ronceret's play with a stolidity which might so easily have been taken for indifference, that Mme. Granson fancied she had been mistaken as to her son's feelings.

Athanase's apparent carelessness explained his refusal to sacrifice his so-called "Liberal" opinions. This word, then recently coined for the Emperor Alexander, proceeded into the language, I believe, by way of Mme. de Staël through Benjamin Constant.

After that fatal evening the unhappy young man took to haunting one of the most picturesque walks along the Sarthe; every artist who comes to Alençon sketches it from that point of view, for the sake of the water-mills, and the river gleaming brightly out among the fields, between the shapely well-grown trees on either side. Flat though the land may be, it lacks none of the subdued peculiar charm of French landscape; for in France your eyes are never wearied by glaring Eastern sunlight, nor saddened by too continual mist. It is a lonely spot. Dwellers in the provinces care nothing for beautiful scenery, perhaps because it is always about them, perhaps because there is a sense lacking in them. If there is such a thing as a promenade, a mall, or any spot from which you see a beautiful view, it is sure to be the one unfrequented part of the town. Athanase liked the loneliness, with the water like a living presence in it, and the fields just turning green in the warmth of the early spring sunlight. Occasionally some one who had seen him sitting at a poplar foot, and received an intent gaze from his eyes, would speak to Mme. Granson about him.

“There is something the matter with your son.”

“I know what he is about,” the mother would say with a satisfied air, hinting that he was meditating some great work.

Athanase meddled no more in politics; he had no opinions; and yet, now and again, he was merry enough, merry at the expense of others, after the wont of those who stand alone and apart in contempt of public opinion. The young fellow lived so entirely outside the horizon of provincial ideas and amusements that he was interesting to few people; he did not so much as rouse curiosity. Those who spoke of him to his mother did so for her sake, not for his. Not a creature in Alençon sympathized with Athanase; the Sarthe received the tears which no friend, no loving woman dried. If the magnificent Suzanne had chanced to pass that way, how much misery might have been prevented—the two young creatures would have fallen in love.

And yet Suzanne certainly passed that way. Her ambition had been first awakened by a sufficiently marvelous tale of things which happened in 1799; an old story of adventures begun at the sign of the Three Moors had turned her childish brain. They used to tell how an adventuress, beautiful as an angel, had come from Paris with a commission from Fouché to ensnare the Marquis de Montauran, the Chouan leader sent over by the Bourbons; how she met him at that very inn of the Three Moors as he came back from his Mortagne expedition; and how she won his love, and gave him up to his enemies. The romantic figure of this woman, the power of beauty, the whole story of Marie de Verneuil and the Marquis de Montauran, dazzled Suzanne, till, as she grew older, she too longed to play with men's lives. A few months after her flight, she could not resist the desire to see her native place again, on her way to Brittany with an artist. She wanted to see Fougères, where the Marquis de Montauran met his death; and thought of making a pilgrimage to the scenes of stories told to her in childhood of that war in the West, so little known even yet. She wished, beside, to revisit Alençon with such splendor in her surroundings, and so completely metamorphosed, that nobody should know her again. She intended to put her mother beyond the reach of want in one moment, and, in some tactful way, to send a sum of money to poor Athanase—a sum which for genius in modern days is the equivalent of a Rebecca's gift of horse and armor to an Ivanhoe of the Middle Ages.

A month went by. Opinions as to Mlle. Cormon's marriage fluctuated in the strangest way. There was an incredulous section which strenuously denied the truth of the report, and a party of believers who persistently affirmed it. At the end of fourteen days, the doubters received a severe check. Du Bousquier's house was sold to M. de Troisville for forty-three-thousand francs. M. de Troisville meant to live quite quietly in Alençon; he intended to return to Paris after the death of

the Princess Scherbelloff, but until the inheritance fell in he would spend his time in looking after his estates. This much appeared to be fact. But the doubting faction declined to be crushed. Their assertion was that, married or not, du Bousquier had done a capital stroke of business, for his house only stood him in a matter of twenty-seven thousand francs. The believers were taken aback by this peremptory decision on the part of their opponents. "Choisnel, Mademoiselle Cormon's notary, had not heard a word of marriage settlements," added the incredulous.

But on the twentieth day the unshaken believers enjoyed a signal victory over the doubters. M. Lepresseur, the Liberal notary, went to Mlle. Cormon's house, and the contract was signed. This was the first of many sacrifices which Rose made to her husband. The fact was that du Bousquier detested Choisnel; he blamed the notary for Mlle. Armande's refusal in the first place, as well as for his previous rejection by Mlle. Cormon, who, as he believed, had followed Mlle. Armande's example. He managed Mlle. Cormon so well, that she, noble-hearted woman, believing that she had misjudged her future husband, wished to make reparation for her doubts, and sacrifice her notary to her love. Still she submitted the contract to Choisnel, and he—a man worthy of Plutarch—defended Mlle. Cormon's interests by letter. This was the one cause of delay.

Mlle. Cormon received a good many anonymous letters. She was informed, to her no small astonishment, that Suzanne was as honest a woman as she was herself; and that the seducer in the false toupet could not possibly have played the part assigned to him in such an adventure. Mlle. Cormon scorned anonymous letters; she wrote, however, to Suzanne with a view to gaining light on the creeds of the Maternity Society. Suzanne probably had heard of du Bousquier's approaching marriage; she confessed to her stratagem, sent a thousand francs to the Fund, and damaged the forage-con-

tractor's character very considerably. Mlle. Cormon called an extraordinary meeting of the Maternity Charity, and the assembled matrons passed a resolution that henceforward the Fund should give help after and not before misfortunes befall.

In spite of these proceedings, which supplied the town with titbits of gossip to discuss, the banns were published at the church and the mayor's office. It was Athanase's duty to make out the needful documents. The betrothed bride had gone to the Prébaudet, a measure taken partly by way of conventional modesty, partly for general security. Thither du Bousquier went every morning, fortified by atrocious and sumptuous bouquets, returning in the evening to dinner.

At last, one gray rainy day in June, the wedding took place; and Mlle. Cormon and the Sieur du Bousquier, as the incredulous faction called him, were married at the parish church in the sight of all Alençon. Bride and bridegroom drove to the mayor's office, and afterward to the church, in a calèche—a splendid equipage for Alençon. Du Bousquier had it sent privately from Paris. The loss of the old cariole was a kind of calamity for the whole town. The saddler of the Porte de Séz lost an income of fifty francs per annum for repairs; he lifted up his voice and wept. With dismay the town of Alençon beheld the luxury introduced by the Maison Cormon; every one feared a rise of prices all round, an increase of house rent, an invasion of Paris furniture. There were some whose curiosity pricked them to the point of giving Jacquelin ten sous for a nearer sight of so startling an innovation in a thrifty province. A pair of Normandy horses likewise caused much concern.

“If we buy horses for ourselves in this way, we shall not sell them long to those that come to buy of us,” said du Ronceret's set.

The reasoning seemed profound, stupid though it was, in so far as it prevented the district from securing a monopoly of

money from outside. In the political economy of the provinces the wealth of nations consists not so much in a brisk circulation of money as in hoards of unproductive coin.

At length the old maid's fatal wish was fulfilled. Penelope sank under the attack of pleurisy contracted forty days before the wedding. Nothing could save her. Mme. Granson, Mariette, Mme. du Coudrai, Mme. du Ronceret—the whole town, in fact—noticed that the bride came into church with the left foot foremost, an omen all the more alarming because the word Left even then had acquired a political significance.

The officiating priest chanced to open the mass-book at the *De profundis*. And so the wedding passed off, amid presages so ominous, so gloomy, so overwhelming, that nobody was found to augur well of it. Things went from bad to worse. There was no attempt at a wedding-party; the bride and bridegroom started out for the Prébaudet. Paris fashions were to supplant old customs! In the evening Alençon said its say as to all these absurdities; some persons had reckoned upon one of the usual provincial jollifications, which they considered they had a right to expect, and these spoke their minds pretty freely. But Mariette and Jacquelin had a merry wedding, and they alone in all Alençon gainsaid the dismal prophecies.

Du Bousquier wished to spend the profit made by the sale of his house on restoring and modernizing the Cormon place. He had quite made up his mind to stay for some months at the Prébaudet, whither he brought his Uncle de Sponde. The news spread dismay through Alençon; every one felt that du Bousquier was about to draw the country into the downward path of domestic comfort. The foreboding grew to a fear one morning when du Bousquier drove over from the Prébaudet to superintend his workmen at the Val-Noble; and the townspeople beheld a tilbury, harnessed to a new horse, and René in livery by his master's side. Du Bousquier had invested his wife's savings in the Funds which stood at sixty-

seven francs fifty centimes. This was the first act of the new administration. In the space of one year, by constantly speculating for a rise, he made for himself a fortune almost as considerable as his wife's. But something else happened in connection with this marriage to make it seem yet more inauspicious, and put all previous overwhelming portents and alarming innovations into the background.

It was the evening of the wedding-day. Athanase and his mother were sitting in the salon by the little fire of brushwood (or *régalades*, as they say in the patois), which the servant had lighted after dinner.

"Well," said Mme. Granson, "we will go to President du Ronceret's to-night, now that we have no Mademoiselle Cormon. Goodness me! I shall never get used to calling her Madame du Bousquier; that name makes my lips sore."

Athanase looked at his mother with a sad constraint; he could not smile, and he wanted to acknowledge, as it were, the artless thoughtfulness which soothed the wound it could not heal.

"Mamma," he began—it was several years since he had used that word, and his tones were so gentle that they sounded like his child's voice—"mamma, dear, do not let us go out just yet; it is so nice here by the fire!"

It was a supreme cry of mortal anguish; the mother heard it but did not understand.

"Let us stay, child," she said. "I would certainly rather talk with you and listen to your plans than play at boston and perhaps lose my money."

"You are beautiful to-night; I like to look at you. And beside, the current of my thoughts is in harmony with this poor little room, where we have been through so much trouble—you and I."

"And there is still more in store for us, poor Athanase, until your work succeeds. For my own part, I am used to poverty; but, oh, my treasure, to look on and see your youth

go by while you have no joy of it! Nothing but work in your life! That thought is like a disease for a mother. It tortures me night and morning. I wake up to it. Ah, God in heaven! what have I done? What sin of mine is punished with this?"

She left her seat, took a little chair, and sat down beside Athanase, nestling close up to his side, till she could lay her head on her child's breast. Where a mother is truly a mother, the grace of love never dies. Athanase kissed her on the eyes, on the gray hair, on the forehead, with the reverent love that fain would lay the soul where the lips are laid.

"I shall never succeed," he said, trying to hide the fatal purpose which he was revolving in his mind.

"Pooh! you are not going to be discouraged? Mind can do all things, as you say. With ten bottles of ink, ten reams of paper, and a strong will, Luther turned Europe upside down. Well, and you are going to make a great name for yourself; you are going to use to good ends the powers which he used for evil. Did you not say so? Now *I* remember what you say, you see; I understand much more than you think; for you still lie so close under my heart, that your least little thought thrills through it, as your slightest movement did once."

"I shall not succeed *here*, you see, mamma, and I will not have you looking on while I am struggling and heartsore and in anguish. Mother, let me leave Alençon; I want to go through it all away from you."

"I want to be at your side always," she said proudly. "Suffering alone! *you* without your mother! your poor mother that would be your servant if need were, and keep out of sight for fear of injuring you, if you wished it, and never accuse you of pride! No, no, Athanase, we will never be parted!"

Athanase put his arms about her and held her with a passionate, tight clasp, as a dying man might cling to life.

"And yet I wish it," he said. "If we do not part, it is all over with me. The double pain—yours and mine—would kill me. It is better that I should live, is it not?"

Mme. Granson looked with haggard eyes into her son's face.

"So this is what you have been brooding over! They said truth. Then are you going away?"

"Yes."

"But you are not going until you have told me all about it, and without giving me any warning? You must have some things to take with you, and money. There are some louis d'ors sewed into my petticoat; you must have them."

Athanase burst into tears.

"That was all that I wanted to tell you," he said after a while. "Now, I will see you to the president's house."

Mother and son went out together. Athanase left Mme. Granson at the door of the house where she was to spend the evening. He looked long at the shafts of light that escaped through chinks in the shutters. He stood there glued to the spot, while a quarter of an hour went by, and it was with almost delirious joy that he heard his mother say: "Grand independence of hearts."

"Poor mother, I have deceived her!" he exclaimed to himself as he reached the river.

He came down to the tall poplar on the bank where he had been wont to sit and meditate during the last six weeks. Two big stones lay there; he had brought them himself for a seat. And now, looking out over the fair landscape lying in the moonlight, he passed in review all the so glorious future that should have been his. He went through cities stirred to enthusiasm by his name; he heard the cheers of crowded streets, breathed the incense of banquets, looked with a great yearning over that life of his dreams, rose uplifted and radiant in glorious triumph, raised a statue to himself, summoned up all his illusions to bid them farewell in a last Olympian carouse,

The magic could only last for a little while ; it fled, it had vanished forever. In that supreme moment he clung to his beautiful tree as if it had been a friend ; then he put the stones, one in either pocket, and buttoned his overcoat. His hat he had purposely left at home. He went down the bank to look for a deep spot which he had had in view for some time ; and slid in resolutely, trying to make as little noise as possible. There was scarcely a sound.

When Mme. Granson came home about half-past nine that night, the maid-of-all-work said nothing of Athanase, but handed her a letter. Mme. Granson opened it and read—

“ I have gone away, my kind mother ; do not think hardly of me.” That was all.

“ A pretty thing he has done ! ” cried she. “ And how about his linen and the money ? But he will write, and I shall find him. The poor children always think themselves wiser than their fathers and mothers.” And she went to bed with a quiet mind.

The Sarthe had risen with yesterday’s rain. Fishers and anglers were prepared for this, for the swollen river washes down the eels from the little streams on its course. It so happened that an eel-catcher had set his lines over the very spot where poor Athanase had chosen to drown himself, thinking that he should never be heard of again ; and next morning, about six o’clock, the man drew out the newly dead body.

One or two women among Mme. Granson’s few friends went to prepare the poor widow with all possible care to receive the dreadful yield of the river. The news of the suicide, as might be expected, produced a tremendous sensation. Only last evening the poverty-stricken man of genius had not a single friend ; the morning after his death scores of voices cried : “ I would so willingly have helped him ! ” So easy is it to play a charitable part when no outlay is involved. The Chevalier de Valois, in the spirit of revenge, explained

the suicide. It was a boyish, sincere, and noble passion for Mlle. Cormon that drove Athanase to take his own life. And when the chevalier had opened Mme. Granson's eyes, she saw a multitude of little things to confirm this view. The story grew touching; women cried over it.

Even before Mme. du Bousquier came back to town, her obliging friend, Mme. du Ronceret, went to fling a dead body down among the roses of her new-wedded happiness, to let her know what a love she had refused. Ever so gently Mme. President squeezed a shower of drops of wormwood over the honey of the first month of married life. And as Mme. du Bousquier returned, it so happened that she met Mme. Granson at the corner of the Val-Noble, and the look in the heart-broken mother's eyes cut her to the quick. It was a look from a woman dying of grief, a thousand curses gathered up into one glance of malediction, a thousand sparks in one gleam of hate. It frightened Mme. du Bousquier; it boded ill and invoked ill upon her.

Mme. Granson had belonged to the party most opposed to the curé; she was a bitter partisan of the priest of St. Leonard's; but on the very evening of the tragedy she thought of the rigid orthodoxy of her own party, and she shuddered. She herself laid her son in his shroud, thinking all the while of the Mother of the Saviour; then, with a soul quivering with agony, she betook herself to the house of the perjured priest. She found him busy, the humble good man, storing the hemp and flax which he gave to poor women and girls to spin, so that no worker should ever want work, a piece of wise charity which had saved more than one family that could not endure to beg. He left his hemp at once and brought his visitor into the dining-room, where the stricken mother saw the frugality of her own housekeeping in the supper that stood waiting for the curé.

"Monsieur l'Abbé," she began. "I have come to entreat you——"

She burst into tears, and could not finish the sentence.

"I know why you have come," answered the holy man, "and I trust to you, madame, and to your relative Madame du Bousquier to make it right with his lordship at Sééz. Yes, I will pray for your unhappy boy; yes, I will say masses; but we must avoid all scandal, we must give no occasion to ill-disposed people to gather together in the church. I myself, alone, and at night——"

"Yes, yes, as you wish, if only he is laid in consecrated ground!" she said, poor mother; and taking the priest's hand in hers, she kissed it.

And so, just before midnight, a bier was smuggled into the parish church. Four young men, Athanase's friends, carried it. There were a few little groups of veiled and black-clad women, Mme. Granson's friends, and some seven or eight lads that had been intimate with the dead. The bier was covered with a pall, torches were lit at the corners, and the curé read the office for the dead, with the help of one little choir boy whom he could trust. Then the suicide was buried, noiselessly, in a corner of the churchyard, and a dark wooden cross with no name upon it marked the grave for the mother. Athanase lived and died in the shadow.

Not a voice was raised against the curé; his lordship at Sééz was silent; the mother's piety redeemed her son's impious deed.

Mme. Granson, by the river-side, whither she had gone to see the place where her son had drowned himself, saw a woman at some distance—a woman who came nearer, till she reached the fatal spot, and exclaimed—

"Then this is the place!"

One other woman in the world wept there as the mother was weeping, and that woman was Suzanne. She had heard of the tragedy on her arrival that morning at the Three Moors. If poor Athanase had been alive, she might have done what poor and generous people dream of doing, and the rich never

think of putting in practice ; she would have inclosed a thousand francs with the words : " Money lent by your father to a comrade who now repays you." During her journey Suzanne had thought of this angelic way of giving. She looked up and saw Mme. Granson.

" I loved him," she said ; then she hurried away.

Susanne, true to her nature, did not leave Alençon till she had changed the bride's wreath of orange flowers to water-lilies. She was the first to assert that Mme. du Bousquier would be Mlle. Cormon as long as she lived. And with that one jibe she avenged both Athanase and the dear Chevalier de Valois.

Alençon beheld another and more piteous suicide. Athanase was promptly forgotten by a world that willingly, and indeed of necessity, forgets its dead as soon as possible ; but the poor chevalier's existence became a kind of death-in-life, a suicide continued morning after morning during fourteen years. Three months after du Bousquier's marriage, people remarked, not without astonishment, that the chevalier's linen was turning yellow, and his hair irregularly combed. M. de Valois was no more, for a disheveled M. de Valois could not be said to be himself. An ivory tooth here and there deserted from the ranks, and no student of human nature could discover to what corps they belonged, whether they were native or foreign, animal or vegetable ; nor whether, finally, they had been extracted by old age, or were merely lying out of sight and out of mind in the chevalier's dressing-table drawer. His cravat was wisped, careless of elegance, into a cord. The negroes' heads grew pale for lack of soap and water. The lines on the chevalier's face deepened into wrinkles and darkened as his complexion grew more and more like parchment ; his neglected nails were sometimes adorned with an edge of black velvet. Grains of snuff lay scattered like autumn leaves in the furrows of his vest.

Hitherto the chevalier's nose had made a peculiarly elegant

appearance in public ; never had it been seen to distill a drop of amber, to let fall a dark wafer of moist rappee ; but now, with a snuff-bedabbled border about the nostrils, and an unsightly stream taking advantage of the channel hollowed above the upper lip, that nose, which no longer took pains to please, revealed the immense trouble that the chevalier must have formerly taken with himself.

Latterly the chevalier's witticisms had been few and far between ; the anecdotes went the way of the teeth, but his appetite continued as good as ever ; out of the great shipwreck of his hopes he saved nothing but his digestion ; and while he took his snuff feebly, he dispatched his dinner with an avidity alarming to behold. You may mark the extent of the havoc wrought in his ideas in the fact that his colloquies with the Princess Goritza grew less and less frequent. He came to Mlle. Armande's one day with a false calf in front of his shins. The bankruptcy of elegance was something painful, I protest ; all Alençon was shocked by it. It scared society to see an elderly young man drop suddenly into his dotage, and from sheer depression of spirits pass from fifty to ninety years. And beside, he had betrayed his secret. He had been waiting and lying in wait for Mlle. Cormon. For ten long years, persevering sportsman that he was, he had been stalking the game, and then he had missed his shot.

He became a man of the worst character. The Liberal party laid all du Bousquier's foundlings on the chevalier's doorstep, while the Faubourg Saint-Germain of Alençon boastingly accepted them ; laughed and cried : "The dear chevalier ! What else could he do ?" Saint-Germain pitied the chevalier, took him to its bosom, and smiled more than ever upon him ; while an appalling amount of unpopularity was drawn down upon du Bousquier's head.

But the especial result of the marriage was a more sharply marked division of parties in Alençon. The Maison d'Esgrignon represented undiluted aristocracy ; for the Troisvilles

on their return joined the clique. The Maison Cormon, skillfully influenced by du Bousquier, was not exactly Liberal, nor yet resolutely Royalist, but of that unlucky shade of opinion which produced the 221 members, so soon as the political struggle took a definite shape, and the greatest, most august, and only real power of kingship came into collision with that most false, fickle, and tyrannical power which, when wielded by an elective body, is known as the power of Parliament.

The third salon, the salon du Ronceret, out-and-out Radical in its politics, was firmly but secretly allied with the Maison Cormon.

With the return from the Prébaudet, a life of continual suffering began for the Abbé de Sponde. He kept all that he endured locked within his soul, uttering not a word of complaint to his niece; but to Mlle. Armande he opened his heart, admitting that, taking one folly with another, he should have preferred the chevalier.

"Mademoiselle," the old abbé said as the thin tears fell from his faded old eyes, "the lime-tree walk, where I have been used to meditate these fifty years, is gone. My dear lime-trees have all been cut down! Just as I am nearing the end of my days the Republic has come back again in the shape of a horrible revolution in the house."

"Your niece must be forgiven," said the Chevalier de Valois. "Republicanism is a youthful error; youth goes out to seek for liberty, and finds tyranny in its worst form—the tyranny of the impotent rabble. Your niece, poor thing, has not been punished by the thing wherein she sinned."

"What is to become of me in a house with naked women dancing all over the walls? Where shall I find the lime-tree walks where I used to read my breviary?"

Like Kant, who lost the thread of his ideas when somebody cut down the fir-tree on which he fixed his eyes as he meditated, the good abbé pacing up and down the shadowless

alleys could not say his prayers with the same uplifting of soul. Du Bousquier had laid out an English garden !

"It looked nicer," Mme. du Bousquier said. Not that she really thought so, but the Abbé Couturier had authorized her to say and do a good many things that she might please her husband.

The Abbé de Sponde was the first to see the unhappiness which lay beneath the surface of his dear child's married life. The old dignified simplicity which ruled their way of living was gone ; du Bousquier gave two balls every month in the course of the first winter. The venerable house—oh, to think of it !—echoed with the sound of violins and worldly gayety. The abbé, on his knees, prayed while the merriment lasted.

The politics of the sober salon underwent a gradual change for the worse. The Abbé de Sponde, divined du Bousquier ; he shuddered at his nephew's dictatorial tone. He saw tears in his niece's eyes when the disposal of her fortune was taken out of her hands ; her husband left her only the control of the linen, the table, and such things as fall to a woman's lot.

Does any one know how much it costs to give up the delicious exercise of authority ? If the triumph of will is one of the most intoxicating of the great man's joys, to have one's own way is the whole life of narrow natures. No one but a cabinet minister fallen into disgrace can sympathize with Mme. du Bousquier's bitter pain when she saw herself reduced to a cipher in her own house.

But these beginnings were the roses of life. Every concession was counseled by poor Rose's love for her husband, and at first du Bousquier behaved admirably to his wife. He was very good to her ; he brought forward sufficient reasons for every encroachment. The room, so long left empty, echoed with the voices of husband and wife in fireside talk. And so, for the first few years of married life, Mme. du Bousquier wore a face of content, and that little air of emancipation and mystery often seen in a young wife after a marriage of love.

She had no more trouble with "heated blood." This countenance of hers routed scoffers, gave the lie to gossip concerning du Bousquier's impotence, and put observers of human nature at fault.

Rose-Marie-Victoire was so afraid lest she should lose her husband's affection or drive him from her side by setting her will against his, that she would have made any sacrifice, even of her uncle if need be. And the Abbé de Sponde, deceived by Mme. du Bousquier's poor foolish little joys, bore his own discomforts the more easily for the thought that his niece was happy.

At first Alençon shared this impression. But there was one man less easy to deceive than all the rest of Alençon put together. The Chevalier de Valois had taken refuge on the sacred mount of the most aristocratic section, and spent his time with the d'Esgrignons. The perpetrator of puns had been already brought low, and he meant to stab du Bousquier to the heart.

The poor abbé, knowing as he did the cowardliness of his niece's first and last love, shuddered as he guessed his nephew's hypocritical nature and the man's intrigues. Du Bousquier, be it said, put some constraint upon himself; he had an eye to the abbé's property, and had no wish to annoy his wife's uncle in any way, yet he dealt the old man his death-blow.

If you can translate the word Intolerance by Firmness of Principle; if you can forbear to condemn in the old Roman Catholic vicar-general that stoicism which Scott has taught us to revere in Jeanie Deans' puritan father; if, finally, you can recognize in the Roman church the nobility of a *Potius mori quam fœdari* which you admire in a Republican—then you can understand the anguish that rent the great Abbé de Sponde when he saw the apostate in his nephew's drawing-room; when he was compelled to meet the renegade, the backslider, the enemy of the church, the aider and abettor of the Oath to the Constitution. It was du Bousquier's private ambition to

lord it over the countryside ; and as a first proof of his power, he determined to reconcile the officiating priest of St. Leonard's with the curé of Alençon. He gained his object. His wife imagined that peace had been made where the stern abbé saw no peace, but surrender of principle. M. de Sponde was left alone in the faith. The bishop came to du Bousquier's house, and appeared satisfied with the cessation of hostilities. The Abbé François' goodness had conquered every one—every one except the old Roman of the Roman church, who might have cried with Cornélie : “ Ah, God ! what virtues you make me hate ! ” The Abbé de Sponde died when orthodoxy expired in the diocese.

In 1819 the Abbé de Sponde's property raised Mme. du Bousquier's income from land to twenty-five thousand livres without counting the Prébaudet or the house in the Val-Noble. About the same time du Bousquier returned the amount of his wife's savings (which she had made over to him) and instructed her to invest the money in purchases of land near the Prébaudet, so that the estate, including the Abbé de Sponde's adjoining property, was one of the largest in the department. As for du Bousquier, he invested his money with the Kellers, and made a journey to Paris four times a year. Nobody knew the exact amount of his private fortune, but at this time he was supposed to be one of the wealthiest men in the department of the Orne. A dexterous man, and the permanent candidate of the Liberal party, he always lost his election by seven or eight votes under the Restoration. Ostensibly he repudiated his connection with the Liberals, offering himself as a Ministerial-Royalist candidate ; but although he succeeded in gaining the support of the Congrégation and of the magistrature, the repugnance of the administration was too strong to be overcome.

Then the rabid Republican, frantic with ambition, conceived the idea of beginning a struggle with the royalism and aristocracy of the country, just as they were carrying all before

them. He gained the support of the clergy by an appearance of piety very skillfully kept up ; always going with his wife to mass, giving money to the convents, and supporting the confraternity of the Sacred Heart ; and whenever a dispute arose between the clergy and the town, or the department, or the State, he was very careful to take the clerical side. And so, while secretly supported by the Liberals, he gained the influence of the church ; and as a Constitutional-Royalist kept close beside the aristocratic section, the better to ruin it. And ruin it he did. He brought about an industrial revolution ; and his detestation of certain families on the high road to Brittany rapidly increased the material prosperity of the province.

And so he paved the way for his revenge upon the *gens à châteaux* in general, and the d'Esgrignons in particular ; some day, not so very far distant, he would plunge a poisoned blade into the very heart of the clique. He found capital to revive the manufacture of point d'Alençon and to increase the linen trade. Alençon began to spin its own flax by machinery. And while his name was associated with all these interests, and written in the hearts of the masses, while he did all that Royalty left undone, du Bousquier risked not a centime of his own. With his means, he could afford to wait while enterprising men with little capital were obliged to give up and leave the results of their labors to luckier successors. He posed as a banker. A Laffitte on a small scale, he became a sleeping partner in all new inventions, taking security for his money. And as a public benefactor he did remarkably well for himself. He was a promoter of insurance companies, a patron of new public conveyances ; he got up memorials for necessary roads and bridges. The authorities, being left behind in this way, regarded this activity in the light of an encroachment ; they blundered, and put themselves into the wrong, for the prefecture was obliged to give way for the good of the country.

Du Bousquier embittered the provincial noblesse against the court nobles and the peerage. He helped, in short, to bring it to pass that a very large body of Constitutional-Royalists supported the "*Journal des Débats*" and M. de Chateaubriand in a contest with the throne. It was an ungrateful opposition based on ignoble motives which contributed to bring about the triumph of the bourgeoisie and the press in 1830. Wherefore du Bousquier, like those whom he represented, had the pleasure of watching a funeral procession of Royalty* pass through their district without a single demonstration of sympathy for a population alienated from them in ways so numerous that they cannot be indicated here.

Then the old Republican, with all that weight of masses on his conscience, hauled down the white flag above the town-hall amid the applause of the people. For fifteen years he had acted a part to satisfy his vendetta, and no man in France beholding the new throne raised in August, 1830, could feel more intoxicated than he with the joy of revenge. For him, the succession of the younger branch meant the triumph of the Revolution; for him, the hoisting of the tricolor flag was the resurrection of the Mountain; and *this* time the nobles should be brought low by a surer method than the guillotine, in that its action should be less violent. A peerage for life only; a National Guard which stretches the marquis and the grocer from the corner-store on the same camp-bed; the abolition of entail demanded by a bourgeois barrister; a Catholic church deprived of its supremacy; in short, all the legislative inventions of August, 1830, simply meant for du Bousquier the principles of 1793 carried out in a more ingenious manner.

Du Bousquier has been receiver-general of taxes since 1830. He relied for success upon his old connections with Égalité Orléans (father of Louis Philippe) and M. de Folmon, steward of the dowager duchess. He is supposed to have an income

* Charles X. on his way to England.

of eighty thousand livres. In the eyes of his fellow-countrymen, *Monsieur* du Bousquier is a man of substance, honorable, upright, obliging, unswerving in his principles. To him, Alençon owes her participation in the industrial movement which makes her, as it were, the first link in a chain which some day perhaps may bind Brittany to the state of things which we nickname "modern civilization." In 1816 Alençon boasted but two carriages, properly speaking; ten years afterward, calèches, coupés, landaus, cabriolets, and tilburies were rolling about the streets without causing any astonishment. At first the townsmen and landowners were alarmed by the rise of prices, afterward they discovered that the increased expenditure produced a corresponding increase in their incomes.

Du Ronceret's prophetic words: "Du Bousquier is a very strong man," were now taken up by the country. But, unfortunately for du Bousquier's wife, the remark is a shocking misnomer. Du Bousquier, the husband, is a very different person from du Bousquier the public man and politician. The great citizen, so liberal in his opinions, so easy humored, so full of love for his country, is a despot at home, and has not a particle of love for his wife. The Cromwell of the Val-Noble is profoundly astute, hypocritical, and crafty; he behaves to those of his own household as he behaved to the aristocrats on whom he fawned, until he could cut their throats. Like his friend Bernadotte, he has an iron hand in a velvet glove. His wife gave him no children. Suzanne's epigram and the Chevalier de Valois' insinuations were justified; but the Liberals and Constitutional-Royalists among the townpeople, the little squires, the magistrature, and the "clericals" (as the "Constitutionnel" used to say), all threw the blame upon Mme. du Bousquier. M. du Bousquier had married such an elderly wife, they said; and beside, how lucky it was for her, poor thing, for at her age bearing a child meant such a risk. If, in periodically recurrent despair, Mme. du Bous-

quier confided her troubles with tears to Mme. du Coudrai or Mme. du Ronceret :

“Why you must be mad, dear !” those ladies would reply. “You do not know what you want ; a child would be the death of you.”

Men like M. du Coudrai, who followed du Bousquier’s lead because they fastened their hopes to his success, would prompt their wives to sing du Bousquier’s praises ; and Rose must listen to speeches that wounded like a stab.

“You are very fortunate, dear, to have such a capable husband ; some men have no energy, and can neither manage their own property nor bring up their children ; you are spared these troubles.”

Or, “Your husband is making you queen of the district, fair lady. *He* will never leave you at a loss ; he does everything in Alençon.”

“But I should like him to take less trouble for the public and rather——”

“My dear Mme. du Bousquier, you are very hard to please ; all the women envy you your husband.”

Unjustly treated by a world which condemned her without a hearing, she found ample scope for the exercise of Christian virtues in her inner life. She who lived in tears always turned a serene face upon the world. For her, pious soul, was there not sin in the thought which was always pecking at her heart —“I loved the Chevalier de Valois, and I am du Bousquier’s wife?” Athanase’s love rose up like a remorse to haunt her dreams.

The Chevalier de Valois was the malignant artificer of her misfortune. He had it on his mind to snatch his opportunity and undeceive Mme. du Bousquier as to one of her articles of faith ; for the chevalier, a man of experience, saw through du Bousquier the married man, as he had seen through du Bousquier the bachelor. But it was not easy to take the astute Republican by surprise. His salon, naturally, was closed to

the Chevalier de Valois, as to all others who discontinued their visits to the Maison Cormon at the time of his marriage. And beside, du Bousquier was above the reach of ridicule; he possessed an immense fortune, he was king of Alençon; and as for his wife, he cared about her much as Richard III. might have cared for the loss of the horse with which he thought to win the battle. To please her husband, Mme. du Bousquier had broken with the Maison d'Esgrignon, but sometimes, when he was away at Paris for a few days, she paid Mlle. Armande a visit.

Two years after Mme. du Bousquier's marriage, just at the time of the abbe's death, Mlle. Armande went up to her as she came out of church. Both women had been to St. Leonard's to hear a *messe noire* (lit., black mass) said for M. de Sponde; and Mlle. Armande, a generous natured woman, thinking that she ought to try to comfort the weeping heiress, walked with her as far as the parade. From the parade, still talking of the beloved and lost, they came to the forbidden Hôtel d'Esgrignon, and Mlle. Armande drew Mme. du Bousquier into the house by the charm of her talk. Perhaps the poor broken-hearted woman loved to speak of her uncle with some one whom her uncle had loved so well. And beside, she wished to receive the old marquis' greetings after an interval of nearly three years. It was half-past one o'clock; the Chevalier de Valois had come to dinner, and with a bow he held out both hands.

"Ah! well, dear, good, and well-beloved lady," he said tremulously, "*we* have lost our sainted friend. Your mourning is ours. Yes; your loss is felt as deeply here as under your own roof—more deeply," he added, alluding to du Bousquier.

A funeral oration followed, to which every one contributed his phrase; then the chevalier, gallantly taking the lady's hand, drew it under his arm, pressed it in the most adorable way, and led her aside into the embrasure of a window.

"You are happy, at any rate?" he asked with a fatherly tone in his voice.

"Yes," she said, lowering her eyes.

Hearing that "Yes," Mme. de Troisville (daughter of the Princess Scherbelloff) and the old Marquise de Castéran came up; Mlle. Armande also joined them, and the group took a turn in the garden till dinner should be ready. Mme. du Bousquier was so stupid with grief that she did not notice that a little conspiracy of curiosity was on foot among the ladies.

"We have her here, let us find out the answer to the riddle," the glances exchanged among them seemed to say.

"You should have children to make your happiness complete," began Mlle. Armande, "a fine boy like my nephew now——"

Tears came to Mme. du Bousquier's eyes.

"I have heard it said that it was entirely your own fault if you had none," said the chevalier, "that you were afraid of the risk."

"*I!*" she cried, innocently; "I would endure a hundred years in hell to have a child."

The subject thus broached, Mme. la Vicomtesse de Troisville and the dowager Marquise de Castéran steered the conversation with such exceeding tact that they entangled poor Rose until, all unsuspectingly, she revealed the secrets of her married life. Mlle. Armande laid her hand on the chevalier's arm, and they left the three matrons to talk confidentially. Then Mme. du Bousquier's mind was disabused with regard to the deception of her marriage; and as she was still "a natural," she amused her confidantes with her irresistible naïveté. Before long the whole town was in the secret of du Bousquier's manœuvres, and knew that Mlle. Cormon's marriage was a mockery; but after the first burst of laughter, Mme. du Bousquier gained the esteem and sympathy of every woman in it. While Mlle. Cormon rushed unsuccessfully at

opportunities of establishing herself, every one had laughed ; but people admired her when they knew the position in which she was placed by the severity of her religious principles. " Poor, dear Mademoiselle Cormon ! " was replaced by " poor Madame du Bousquier ! "

In this way the chevalier made du Bousquier both ridiculous and very unpopular for a while, but the ridicule died down with time ; the slander languished when everybody had cut his joke ; and beside, it seemed to many persons that the mute Republican had a right to retire at the age of fifty-seven. But if du Bousquier previously hated the Maison d'Esgrignon, this incident so increased his rancor that he was pitiless afterward in the day of vengeance. Mme. du Bousquier received orders never to set foot in that house again ; and by way of reprisals, he inserted the following paragraph in the "*Orne Courier*," his own new paper :

" A REWARD of Funds to bring in a thousand francs will be paid to any person who shall prove that one M. de Pombreton existed either before or after the Emigration. "

Though Mme. du Bousquier's happiness was essentially negative, she saw that her marriage had its advantages. Was it not better to take an interest in the most remarkable man in the place than to live alone ? After all, du Bousquier was better than the dogs, cats, and canaries on which old maids centre their affections ; and his feeling for his wife was something more genuine and disinterested than the attachment of servants, confessors, and legacy-hunters. At a still later period she looked upon her husband as an instrument in God's hands to punish her for the innumerable sins which she discovered in her desires for marriage ; she regarded herself as justly rewarded for the misery which she had brought on Mme. Granson, and for hastening her own uncle's end. She felt the strongest aversion for the conduct and opinions of the man

she had married, and yet it was her duty to take a tender interest in him; and if, as often happened, du Bousquier ate her preserves, or thought that the dinner was good, she was in the seventh heaven. She saw that his comfort was secured even in the smallest details.

Did du Bousquier go on a journey, she fidgeted over his traveling cloak and his linen; she took the most minute precautions for his material comfort. If he was going over to the Prébaudet, she began to consult the weather-glass twenty-four hours beforehand. A sleeping dog has eyes and ears for his master, and so it was with Mme. du Bousquier; she used to watch the expression of her husband's face to read his wishes. And if that burly personage, vanquished by duty-prescribed love, caught her by the waist and kissed her on the forehead, exclaiming: "You are a good woman!" tears of joy filled the poor creature's eyes. It is probable that du Bousquier felt it incumbent upon him to make compensations which won Rose-Marie-Victoire's respect; for the church does not require that an assumption of wifely devotion should be carried quite so far as Mme. du Bousquier thought necessary. And yet when she listened to the rancorous talk of men who took Constitutional-Royalism as a cloak for their real opinions, the woman of saintly life uttered not a word. She foresaw the downfall of the church, and shuddered. Very occasionally she would hazard some foolish remark, promptly cut in two by a look from du Bousquier. The timid sheep walked in the way marked out by the shepherd; never leaving the bosom of the church, practicing austerities, without a thought of the devil, his pomps and works. And so, within herself, she united the purest Christian virtues, and du Bousquier truly was one of the luckiest men in the kingdom of France and Navarre.

"She will be a simpleton till her last sigh," said the cruel ex-registrar (now cashiered). But, all the same, he dined at her table twice a week.

The story would be singularly incomplete if it omitted to mention a last coincidence: the Chevalier de Valois and Suzanne's mother died at the same time.

The chevalier died with the Monarchy in August, 1830. He went to Nonancourt to join the funeral procession; piously making one of the King's escort to Cherbourg, with the Troisvilles, Castérans, d'Esgrignons, Verneuil's, and the rest. He had brought with him his little hoard of savings and the principal which brought him in his annual income, some fifty thousand francs in all, which he offered to a faithful friend of the elder branch to convey to his majesty. His own death was very near, he said; the money had come to him through the King's bounty; and, after all, the property of the last of the Valois belonged to the Crown. History does not say whether the chevalier's fervent zeal overcame the repugnance of the Bourbon who left his fair kingdom of France without taking one centime into exile; but the King surely must have been touched by the old noble's devotion; and this much is at least certain—Césarine, M. de Valois' universal legatee, inherited scarcely six hundred livres of income at his death. The chevalier came back to Alençon, broken-hearted and spent with the fatigue of the journey, to die just as Charles X. set foot on foreign soil.

Mme. du Val-Noble and her journalist protector, fearing reprisals from the Liberals, were glad of an excuse to return *incognito* to the village where the old mother died. Suzanne attended the sale of the chevalier's furniture to buy some relic of her first good friend, and ran up the price of the snuff-box to the enormous amount of a thousand francs. The Princess Goritza's portrait alone was worth that sum. Two years afterward, a young man of fashion, struck with its marvellous workmanship, obtained it of Suzanne for his collection of fine eighteenth-century snuff-boxes; and so the delicate toy which had been the confidante of the most courtly of love affairs, and the delight of an old age till its very end, is

now brought into the semi-publicity of a collection. If the dead could know what is done after they are gone, there would be a flush at this moment on the chevalier's left cheek.

If this history should inspire owners of sacred relics with a holy fear, and set them drafting codicils to provide for the fate of such precious souvenirs of a happiness now no more, by giving them into sympathetic hands; even so an enormous service would have been rendered to the chivalrous and sentimental section of the public; but it contains another and a much more exalted moral. Does it not show that a new branch of education is needed? Is it not an appeal to the so enlightened solicitude of Ministers of Public Instruction to create chairs of anthropology, a science in which Germany is outstripping us?

Modern myths are even less understood of the people than ancient myths, eaten up with myths though we may be. Fables crowd in upon us on every side, allegory is pressed into service on all occasions to explain everything. If fables are the torches of history, as the humanist school maintains, they may be a means of securing empires from revolution, if only professors of history will undertake that their interpretations thereof shall permeate the masses in the departments. If Mlle. Cormon had had some knowledge of literature; if there had been a professor of anthropology in the department of the Orne; if (a final if) she had read her Ariosto, would the appalling misfortune of her marriage have befallen her? She would, perhaps, have found out for herself why the Italian poet makes his heroine Angelica prefer Medoro (a suave Chevalier de Valois) to Orlando, who had lost his mare, and could do nothing but work himself into a fury.* Might not Medoro be taken as an allegorical figure as the courtier of woman's sovereignty, whereas Orlando is revolution personified, an undisciplined, furious, purely destructive force, incapable of producing anything? This is the opinion

* Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso."

of one of M. Ballanche's pupils; we publish it, declining all responsibility.

As for the tiny negroes' heads, no information of any kind concerning them is forthcoming. Mme. du Val-Noble you may see any day at the opera. Thanks to the primary education given to her by the Chevalier de Valois, she looks almost like a woman who makes a necessity of virtue, while in truth she only exists by virtue of necessity.

Mme. du Bousquier is still living, which is to say, is it not, that her troubles are not yet over? At sixty, when women can permit themselves to make admissions, talking confidentially to Mme. du Courdrai, whose husband was reinstated in August, 1830, she said that the thought that she must die without knowing what it was to be a wife and mother was more than she could bear.

PARIS, *October*, 1836.



THE COLLECTION OF ANTIQUITIES

(Le Cabinet des antiques).

TO BARON VON HAMMER-PURGSTALL,

*Member of the Aulic Council, Author of the History of the
Ottoman Empire.*

Dear Baron :—You have taken so warm an interest in my long, vast History of French Manners in the Nineteenth Century, you have given me so much encouragement to persevere with my work, that you have given me a right to associate your name with some portion of it. Are you not one of the most important representatives of conscientious, studious Germany? Will not your approval win for me the approval of others, and protect this attempt of mine? So proud am I to have gained your good opinion, that I have striven to deserve it by continuing my labors with the unflinching courage characteristic of your methods of study, and of that exhaustive research among documents without which you could never have given your monumental work to the world of letters. Your sympathy with such labor as you yourself have bestowed upon the most brilliant civilization of the East, has often sustained my ardor through nights of toil given to the details of our modern civilization. And will not you, whose naïve kindliness can only be compared with that of our own La Fontaine, be glad to know of this?

May this token of my respect for you and your work find you at Dobling, dear baron, and put you and yours in mind of one of your most sincere admirers and friends.

DE BALZAC.

THERE stands a house at a corner of a street, in the middle of a town, in one of the least important prefectures in France, but the name of the street and the name of the town must be suppressed here. Every one will appreciate the motives of this sage reticence demanded by convention ; for if a writer takes upon himself the office of annalist of his own time, he is bound to touch on many sore subjects. The house was called the Hôtel d'Esgrignon ; but let d'Esgrignon be considered a mere fancy name, neither more nor less connected with real people than the conventional Belval, Floricour, or Derville of the stage, or the Adalberts and Monbreuses of romance. After all, the names of the principal characters will be quite as much disguised ; for though in this history the chronicler would prefer to conceal the facts under a mass of contradictions, anachronisms, improbabilities, and absurdities ; the truth will out in spite of him. You uproot a vine-stock, as you imagine, and the stem will send up lusty shoots after you have ploughed your vineyard over.

The " Hôtel d'Esgrignon " was nothing more nor less than the house in which the old marquis lived ; or, in the style of ancient documents, Charles-Marie-Victor-Ange-Carol, Marquis d'Esgrignon. It was only an ordinary house, but the townspeople and tradesmen had begun by calling it the Hôtel d'Esgrignon in jest, and ended after a score of years by giving it that name in earnest.

The name of Carol, or Karawl, as the Thierrys would have spelt it, was glorious among the names of the most powerful chieftains of the Northmen who conquered Gaul and established the feudal system there. Never had Carol bent his head before King or communes, the church or finance. Intrusted in the days of yore with the keeping of a French March, the title of marquis in their family meant no shadow of imaginary office ; it had been a post of honor with duties to discharge. Their fief had always been their domain. Provincial nobles were they in every sense of the word ; they might

boast of an unbroken line of great descent; they had been neglected by the court for two hundred years; they were lords paramount in the estates of a province where the people looked up to them with superstitious awe, as to the image of the Holy Virgin that cures the toothache. The house of d'Esgrignon, buried in its remote border country, was preserved as the charred piles of one of Cæsar's bridges are maintained intact in a river-bed. For thirteen hundred years the daughters of the house had been married without a dowry or taken the veil; the younger sons of every generation had been content with their share of their mother's dower and gone forth to be captains or bishops; some had made a marriage at Court; one cadet of the house became an admiral, a duke, and a peer of France, and died without issue. Never would the Marquis d'Esgrignon of the elder branch accept the title of duke.

"I hold my marquisate as his majesty holds the realm of France, and on the same conditions," he told the Constable de Luynes, a very paltry fellow in his eyes, at that time.

You may be sure that d'Esgrignons lost their heads on the scaffold during the troubles. The old blood showed itself proud and high even in 1789. The marquis on that day would not emigrate; he was answerable for his March. The reverence in which he was held by the countryside saved his head; but the hatred of the genuine *sans-culottes*, the old Jacobins, was strong enough to compel him to pretend to fly, and for a while he lived in hiding. Then, in the name of the Sovereign People, the d'Esgrignon lands were dishonored by the District, and the woods sold by the Nation in spite of the personal protest made by the marquis, then turned of forty. Mlle. d'Esgrignon, his half-sister, saved some portions of the fief, thanks to the young steward of the family, who claimed on her behalf the *partage de présuccession*, which is to say, the right of a relative to a portion of an *émigré's* lands. To Mlle. d'Esgrignon, therefore, the Republic made over the castle itself and a few farms. Chesnel, the faithful steward,

was obliged to buy in his own name the church, the parsonage house, the castle gardens, and other places to which his patron was attached—the marquis advancing the money.

The slow, swift years of the Terror went by, and the marquis, whose character had won the respect of the whole country, decided that he and his sister ought to return to the castle and improve the property which Maître Chesnel—for he was now a notary—had contrived to save for them out of the wreck.

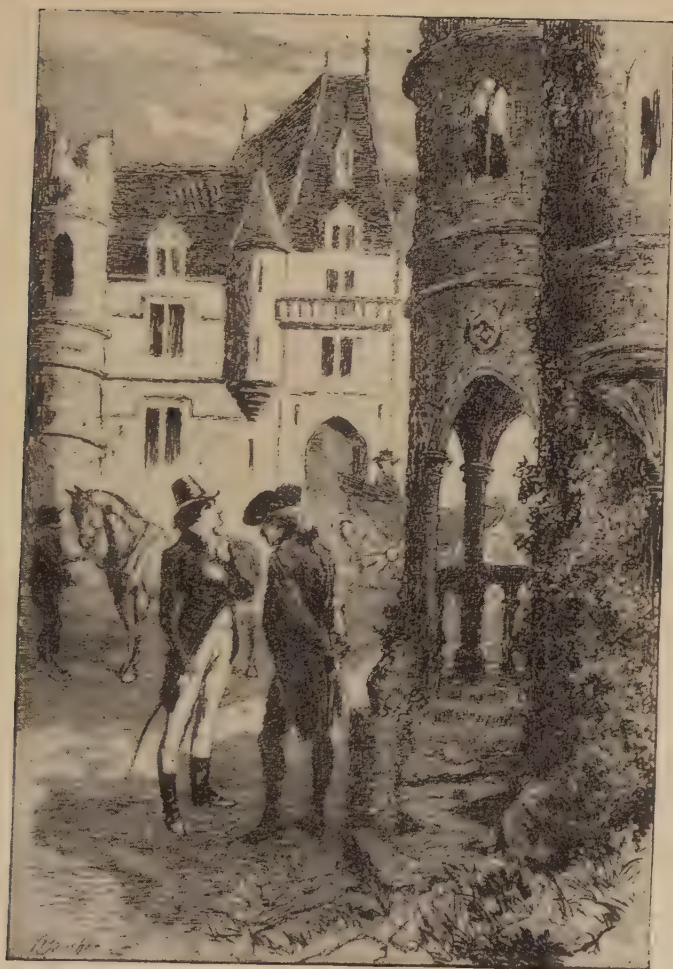
It was in the month of October, 1800, that Chesnel brought the marquis back to the old feudal castle, and saw with deep emotion, almost beyond control, his patron standing in the midst of the empty courtyard, gazing round upon the moat, now filled up with rubbish, and the castle towers razed to the level of the roof. The descendant of the Franks looked for the missing Gothic turrets and the picturesque weather-vanes which used to rise above them; and his eyes turned to the sky, as if asking of heaven the reason of this social upheaval. No one but Chesnel could understand the profound anguish of the great d'Esgrignon, now known as Citizen Carol. For a long while the marquis stood in silence, drinking in the influences of the place, the ancient home of his forefathers, with the air that he breathed; then he flung out a most melancholy exclamation:

“Chesnel,” he said, “we will come back again some day when the troubles are over; I could not bring myself to live here until the edict of pacification has been published; *they* will not allow me to set my escutcheon on the wall.”

He waved his hand toward the castle, mounted his horse, and rode back beside his sister, who had driven over in the notary's shabby basket chaise.

The Hôtel d'Esgrignon in the town had been demolished; a couple of factories now stood on the site of the aristocrat's house. So Maître Chesnel spent the marquis' last bag of louis on the purchase of the old-fashioned building in the square,

HE SAW WITH DEEP EMOTION, ALMOST BEYOND CONTROL,
HIS PATRON STANDING IN THE MIDST OF
THE EMPTY COURTYARD.



with its gables, weather-vane, turret, and dovecot. Once it had been the court-house of the bailiwick, and subsequently the *présidial*; it had belonged to the d'Esgrignons from generation to generation; and now, in consideration of five hundred louis d'or, the present owner made it over with the title given by the Nation to its rightful lord. And so, half in jest, half in earnest, the old house was christened the Hôtel d'Esgrignon.

In 1800 little or no difficulty was made over erasing names from the fatal list, and some few *émigrés* began to return. Among the very first nobles to come back to the old town were the Baron de Nouastre and his daughter. They were completely ruined. M. d'Esgrignon generously offered them the shelter of his roof; and in his house, two months later, the baron died, worn out with grief. The Nouastres came of the best blood of the province; Mlle. de Nouastre was a girl of two-and-twenty; the Marquis d'Esgrignon married her to continue his line. But she died in childbirth, a victim to the unskillfulness of her physician, leaving, most fortunately, a son to bear the name of the d'Esgrignons. The old marquis—he was but fifty-three, but adversity and sharp distress had added months to every year—the poor old marquis saw the death of the loveliest of human creatures, a noble woman in whom the charm of the feminine figures of the sixteenth century lived again, a charm now lost save to men's imaginations. With her death the joy died out of his old age. It was one of those terrible shocks which reverberate through every moment of the years that follow. For a few moments he stood beside the bed where his wife lay, with her hands folded like a saint, then he kissed her on the forehead, turned away, drew out his watch, broke the mainspring, and hung it up beside the hearth. It was eleven o'clock in the morning.

“Mademoiselle d'Esgrignon,” he said, “let us pray God that this hour may not prove fatal yet again to our house. My uncle the archbishop was murdered at this hour; at this hour also my father died——”

He knelt down beside the bed and buried his face in the coverlet; his sister did the same. In another moment they both rose to their feet. Mlle. d'Esgrignon burst into tears; but the old marquis looked with dry eyes at the child, round the room, and again on his dead wife. To the stubbornness of the Frank he united the fortitude of a Christian.

These things came to pass in the second year of the nineteenth century. Mlle. d'Esgrignon was then twenty-seven years of age. She was a beautiful woman. An ex-contractor for forage to the armies of the Republic, a man of the district, with an income of six thousand francs, persuaded Chesnel to carry a proposal of marriage to the lady. The marquis and his sister were alike indignant with such presumption in their man of business, and Chesnel was almost heart-broken; he could not forgive himself for yielding to the *Sieur du Croisier's* blandishments. The marquis' manner with his old servant changed somewhat; never again was there quite the old affectionate kindness, which might almost have been taken for friendship. From that time forth the marquis was grateful, and his magnanimous and sincere gratitude continually wounded the poor notary's feelings. To some sublime natures gratitude seems an excessive payment; they would rather have that sweet equality of feeling which springs from similar ways of thought, and the blending of two spirits by their own choice and will. And Maître Chesnel had known the delights of such high friendship; the marquis had raised him to his own level. The old noble looked on the good notary as something more than a servant, something less than a child; he was the voluntary liege man of the house, a serf bound to his lord by all the ties of affection. There was no balancing of obligations; the sincere affection on either side put that out of the question.

In the eyes of the marquis, Chesnel's official dignity was as nothing; his old servitor was merely disguised as a notary. As for Chesnel, the marquis was now, as always, a being of a

divine race; he believed in nobility; he did not blush to remember that his father had thrown open the doors of the salon to announce that "My Lord Marquis is served." His devotion to the fallen house was due not so much to his creed as to egoism; he looked on himself as one of the family. So his vexation was intense. Once he had ventured to allude to his mistake in spite of the marquis' prohibition, and the old noble answered gravely—"Chesnel, before the troubles you would not have permitted yourself to entertain such injurious suppositions. What can these new doctrines be if they have spoiled *you*?"

Maître Chesnel had gained the confidence of the whole town; people looked up to him; his high integrity and considerable fortune contributed to make him a person of importance. From that time forth he felt a very decided aversion for the *Sieur du Croisier*; and though there was little rancor in his composition, he set others against the sometime forage-contractor. *Du Croisier*, on the other hand, was a man to bear a grudge and nurse a vengeance for a score of years. He hated Chesnel and the *d'Esgrignon* family with the smothered, all-absorbing hate only to be found in a country town. His rebuff had simply ruined him with the malicious provincials among whom he had come to live, thinking to rule over them. It was so real a disaster that he was not long in feeling the consequences of it. He betook himself in desperation to a wealthy old maid, and met with a second refusal. Thus failed the ambitious schemes with which he had started. He had lost his hope of a marriage with *Mlle. d'Esgrignon*, which would have opened the *Faubourg Saint-Germain* of the province to him; and after the second rejection, his credit fell away to such an extent that it was almost as much as he could do to keep his position in the second rank.

In 1805, *M. de la Roche-Guyon*, the oldest son of an ancient family which had previously intermarried with the *d'Esgrignons*, made proposals in form through Maître Chesnel

for Mlle. Marie-Armande-Claire d'Esgrignon. She declined to hear the notary.

"You must have guessed before now that I am a mother, dear Chesnel," she said ; she had just put her nephew, a fine little boy of five, to bed.

The old marquis rose and went up to his sister, but just returned from the cradle ; he kissed her hand reverently, and as he sat down again, found words to say—

"My sister, you are a d'Esgrignon."

A quiver ran through the noble girl ; the tears stood in her eyes. M. d'Esgrignon, the father of the present marquis, had married a second wife, the daughter of a farmer-general* ennobled by Louis XIV. It was a shocking *mésalliance* in the eyes of his family, but fortunately of no importance, since a daughter was the one child of the marriage. Armande knew this. Kind as her brother had always been, he looked on her as a stranger in blood. And this speech of his had just recognized her as one of the family.

And was not her answer the worthy crown of eleven years of her 'noble life? Her every action since she came of age had borne the stamp of the purest devotion ; love for her brother was a sort of religion with her.

"I shall die Mademoiselle d'Esgrignon," she said simply, turning to the notary.

"For you there could be no fairer title," returned Chesnel, meaning to convey a compliment. Poor Mlle. d'Esgrignon reddened.

"You have blundered, Chesnel," said the marquis, flattered by the steward's words, but vexed that his sister had been hurt. "A d'Esgrignon may marry a Montmorency ; their descent is not so pure as ours. The d'Esgrignons bear *or, two bends, gules*," he continued, "and nothing during nine hundred years has changed their escutcheon ; as it was at first, so it is to-day. Hence our device, *Cil est nostre*, taken at a tournā?

* Private contractors who rented the tax collecting.

ment in the reign of Philip Augustus, with the supporters, a knight in armor *or* on the right, and a lion *gules* on the left."

"I do not remember that any woman I have ever met has struck my imagination as Mademoiselle d'Esgrignon did," said Émile Blondet, to whom contemporary literature is indebted for this history among other things. "Truth to tell, I was a boy, a mere child at the time, and perhaps my memory-pictures of her owe something of their vivid color to a boy's natural turn for the marvelous.

"If I was playing with other children on the parade, and she came to walk there with her nephew Victurnien, the sight of her in the distance thrilled me with very much the effect of galvanism on a dead body. Child as I was, I felt as though new life had been given me.

"Mlle. Armande had hair of tawny gold; there was a delicate fine down on her cheek, with a silver gleam upon it which I loved to catch, putting myself so that I could see the outlines of her face lit up by the daylight, and feel the fascination of those dreamy emerald eyes, which sent a flash of fire through me whenever they fell upon my face. I used to pretend to roll on the grass before her in our games, only to try to reach her little feet, and admire them on a closer view. The soft whiteness of her skin, her delicate features, the clearly cut lines of her forehead, the grace of her slender figure, took me with a sense of surprise, while as yet I did not know that her shape was graceful, nor her brows beautiful, nor the outline of her face a perfect oval. I admired as children pray at that age, without too clearly understanding why they pray. When my piercing gaze attracted her notice, when she asked me (in that musical voice of hers, with more volume in it, as it seemed to me, than all other voices), 'What are you doing, little one? Why do you look at me?' I used to come nearer and wriggle and bite my finger-nails, and redden and say: 'I do not know.' And if she chanced

to stroke my hair with her white hand, and ask me how old I was, I would run away and call from a distance: 'Eleven!'

"Every princess and fairy of my visions, as I read the 'Arabian Nights,' looked and walked like Mlle. d'Esgrignon; and afterward, when my drawing-master gave me heads from the antique to copy, I noticed that their hair was braided like Mlle. d'Esgrignon's. Still later, when the foolish fancies had vanished one by one, Mlle. Armande remained vaguely in my memory as a type; that Mlle. Armande for whom men made way respectfully, following the tall brown-robed figure with their eyes along the parade and out of sight. Her exquisitely graceful form, the rounded curves sometimes revealed by a chance gust of wind, and always visible to my eyes in spite of the ample folds of stuff, revisited my young man's dreams. Later yet, when I came to think seriously over certain mysteries of human thought, it seemed to me that the feeling of reverence was first inspired in me by something expressed in Mlle. d'Esgrignon's face and bearing. The wonderful calm of her face, the surpressed passion in it, the dignity of her movements, the saintly life of duties fulfilled—all this touched and awed me. Children are more susceptible than people imagine to the subtle influences of ideas; they never make game of real dignity; they feel the charm of real graciousness, and beauty attracts them, for childhood itself is beautiful, and there are mysterious ties between things of the same nature.

"Mlle. d'Esgrignon was one of my religions. To this day I can never climb the staircase of some old manor-house but my foolish imagination must needs picture Mlle. Armande standing there, like the spirit of feudalism. I can never read old chronicles but she appears before my eyes in the shape of some famous woman of old time; she is Agnes Sorel, Marie Touchet, Gabrielle; and I lend her all the love that was lost in her heart, all the love that she never expressed. The angel shape seen in glimpses through the haze of child-

ish fancies visits me now sometimes across the mists of dreams."

Keep this portrait in mind, it is a faithful picture and sketch of character. Mlle. d'Esgrignon is one of the most instructive figures in this story; she affords an example of the mischief that may be done by the purest goodness for lack of intelligence.

Two-thirds of the *émigrés* returned to France during 1804 and 1805, and almost every exile from the Marquis d'Esgrignon's province came back to the land of his fathers. There were certainly defections. Men of good birth entered the service of Napoleon, and went into the army or held places at the Imperial court, and others made alliances with the upstart families. All those who cast in their lots with the Empire retrieved their fortunes and recovered their estates, thanks to the Emperor's munificence; and these for the most part went to Paris and stayed there. But some eight or nine families still remained true to the proscribed noblesse and loyal to the fallen monarchy. The La Roche-Guyons, Nouastres, Verneuls, Castérans, Troisvilles, and the rest were some of them rich, some of them poor; but money, more or less, scarcely counted anything among them. They took an antiquarian view of themselves; for them the age and preservation of the pedigree was the one all-important matter; precisely as, for an amateur, the weight of metal in a coin is a small matter in comparison with clean lettering, a flawless stamp, and high antiquity. Of these families, the Marquis d'Esgrignon was the acknowledged head. His house became their inner chamber. There his majesty, Emperor and King, was never anything but "Monsieur de Buonaparte;" there "the King" meant Louis XVIII., then at Mittau; there the Department was still the Province, and the prefecture the *intendance*.

The marquis was honored among them for his admirable behavior, his loyalty as a noble, his undaunted courage; even

as he was respected throughout the town for his misfortunes, his fortitude, his steadfast adherence to his political convictions. All gently bred Imperialists and the authorities themselves showed as much indulgence for his prejudices as respect for his personal character; but there was another and a large section of the new society which was destined to be known after the Restoration as the Liberal party; and these, with du Croisier as their unacknowledged head, laughed at an aristocratic oasis which nobody might enter without proof of irreproachable descent. Their animosity was all the more bitter because honest country squires and the higher officials, with a good many worthy folk in the town, were of the opinion that all the best society thereof was to be found in the Marquis d'Esgrignon's salon. The prefect himself, the Emperor's chamberlain, made overtures to the d'Esgrignons, humbly sending his wife (a Grandlieu) as ambassadress.

Wherefore, those excluded from the miniature provincial Faubourg Saint-Germain nicknamed the salon "The Collection of Antiquities," and called the marquis himself "Mons Carol." The receiver of taxes, for instance, addressed his applications to "M. Carol (*ci-devant* des Grignons)," maliciously adopting the obsolete way of spelling.

"For my own part," said Émile Blondet, "if I try to call up childish memories, I remember that the nickname of 'Collection of Antiquities' always made me laugh, in spite of my respect—my love, I ought to say—for Mlle. d'Esgrignon. The Hôtel d'Esgrignon stood at the angle of two of the busiest thoroughfares in the town, and not five hundred paces away from the market-place. Two of the drawing-room windows looked upon the street and two upon the square; the room was like a glass cage, every one who came past could look through it from side to side. I was only a boy of twelve at the time, but I thought, even then, that the salon was one of those rare curiosities which seem, when you come to think

of them afterward, to lie just on the borderland between reality and dreams, so that you can scarcely tell to which side they most belong.

“The room, the ancient Hall of Audience, stood above a row of cellars with grated air-holes, once the prison-cells of the old court-house, now converted into a kitchen. I do not know that the magnificent lofty chimney-piece of the Louvre, with its marvelous carving, seemed more wonderful to me than the vast open hearth of the *salon d’Esgrignon* when I saw it for the first time. It was covered like a melon with a network of tracery. Over it stood an equestrian portrait of Henry III., under whom the ancient duchy of appanage reverted to the crown; it was a great picture executed in low relief, and set in a carved and gilded frame. The ceiling spaces between the chestnut cross-beams in the fine old roof were decorated with scroll-work patterns; there was a little faded gilding still left along the angles. The walls were covered with Flemish tapestry, six scenes from the Judgment of Solomon, framed in golden garlands, with satyrs and cupids playing among the leaves. The parquet floor had been laid down by the present marquis, and Chesnel had picked up the furniture at sales of the wreckage of old *châteaux* between 1793 and 1795; so that there were Louis XIV. consoles, tables, clock-cases, andirons, candle-sconces and tapestry-covered chairs, which marvelously completed a stately room, large out of all proportion to the house. Luckily, however, there was an equally lofty antechamber, the ancient *Salle des Pas Perdus* of the *présidial*, which communicated likewise with the magistrate’s deliberating chamber, used by the *d’Esgrignons* as a dining-room.

“Beneath the old paneling, amid the threadbare braveries of a bygone day, some eight or ten dowagers were drawn up in state in a quivering line; some with palsied heads, others dark and shriveled like mummies; some erect and stiff, others bowed and bent, but all of them tricked out in more or less

fantastic costumes as far as possible removed from the fashion of the day, with be-ribboned caps above their curled and powdered 'heads,' and old discolored lace. No painter however earnest, no caricature however wild, ever caught the haunting fascination of those aged women; they come back to me in dreams; their puckered faces shape themselves in my memory whenever I meet an old woman who puts me in mind of them by some faint resemblance of dress or feature. And whether it is that misfortune has initiated me into the secrets of irremediable and overwhelming disaster; whether that I have come to understand the whole range of human feelings, and, best of all, the thoughts of Old Age and Regret; whatever the reason, nowhere and never again have I seen among the living or in the faces of the dying the wan look of certain gray eyes that I remember, nor the dreadful brightness of others that were black.

"Neither Hoffmann nor Maturin, the two weirdest imaginations of our time, ever gave me such a thrill of terror as I used to feel when I watched the automaton movements of those bodies sheathed in whalebone. The paint on actors' faces never caused me a shock; I could see below it the rouge in grain, the *rouge de naissance*, to quote a comrade at least as malicious as I can be. Years had leveled those women's faces, and at the same time furrowed them with wrinkles, till they looked like the heads on wooden nutcrackers carved in Germany. Peeping in through the window-panes, I gazed at the battered bodies, and ill-jointed limbs (how they were fastened together, and, indeed, their whole anatomy was a mystery I never attempted to explain); I saw the lantern jaws, the protuberant bones, the abnormal development of the hips; and the movements of these figures as they came and went seemed to me no whit less extraordinary than their sepulchral immobility as they sat round the card-tables.

"The men looked gray and faded like the ancient tapestries on the wall; in dress they were much more like the men of

the day, but even they were not altogether convincingly alive. Their white hair, their withered waxen-hued faces, their devastated foreheads and pale eyes, revealed their kinship to the women, and neutralized any effects of reality borrowed from their costume.

"The very certainty of finding all these people seated at or among the tables every day at the same hours invested them at length in my eyes with a sort of spectacular interest as it were; there was something theatrical, something unearthly about them.

"Whenever, in after times, I have gone through museums of old furniture in Paris, London, Munich, or Vienna, with the gray-headed custodian who shows you the splendors of time past, I have peopled the rooms with figures from the Collection of Antiquities. Often, as little schoolboys of eight or ten we used to propose to go and take a look at the curiosities in their glass cage, for the fun of the thing. But as soon as I caught sight of Mlle. Armande's sweet face, I used to tremble; and there was a trace of jealousy in my admiration for the lovely child Victurnien, who belonged, as we all instinctively felt, to a different and higher order of being from our own. It struck me as something indescribably strange that the young fresh creature should be there in that cemetery awakened before the time. We could not have explained our thoughts to ourselves, yet we felt that we were bourgeois, utterly insignificant, and of no account in the presence of that proud court."

The disasters of 1813 and 1814, which brought about the downfall of Napoleon, gave new life to the Collection of Antiquities, and what was more than life, the hope of recovering their past importance; but the events of 1815, the troubles of the foreign occupation, and the vacillating policy of the Government until the fall of M. Decazes, all contributed to defer the fulfillment of the expectations of the

personages so vividly described by Blondet. This story, therefore, only begins to shape itself in 1822.

In 1822 the Marquis d'Esgrignon's fortunes had not improved in spite of the changes worked by the Restoration in the condition of *émigrés*. Of all nobles hardly hit by Revolutionary legislation, his case was the hardest. Like other great families, the d'Esgrignons before 1789 derived the greater part of their income from their rights as lords of the manor in the shape of dues paid by those who held of them; and, naturally, the old *seigneurs* had reduced the size of the holdings in order to swell the amounts paid in quit-rents and heriots. Families in this position were hopelessly ruined. They were not affected by the ordinance by which Louis XVIII. put the *émigrés* into possession of such of their lands as had not been sold; and at a later date it was impossible that the law of indemnity should indemnify them. Their suppressed rights, as everybody knows, were revived in the shape of a land tax known by the very name of *domaines*, but the money went into the coffers of the State.

The marquis by his position belonged to that small section of the Royalist party which would hear of no kind of compromise with those whom they styled, not Revolutionaries, but revolted subjects, or, in more parliamentary language, they had no dealings with Liberals or Constitutionnels. Such Royalists, nicknamed Ultras by the opposition, took for leaders and heroes those courageous orators of the Right, who from the very beginning attempted, with M. de Polignac, to protest against the charter granted by Louis XVIII. This they regarded as an ill-advised edict extorted from the Crown by the necessity of the moment, only to be annulled later on. And, therefore, so far from coöperating with the King to bring about a new condition of things, the Marquis d'Esgrignon stood aloof, an upholder of the straitest sect of the Right in politics, until such time as his vast fortune should be restored to him.

The miracles of the Restoration of 1814, the still greater miracle of Napoleon's return in 1815, the portents of a second flight of the Bourbons, and a second reinstatement (that almost fabulous phase of contemporary history), all these things took the marquis by surprise at the age of sixty-seven. At that time of life, the most high-spirited men of their age were not so much vanquished as worn out in the struggle with the Revolution; their activity, in their remote provincial retreats, had turned into a passionately held and immovable conviction; and almost all of them were shut in by the enervating, easy round of daily life in the country. Could worse luck befall a political party than this—to be represented by old men at a time when its ideas are already stigmatized as old-fashioned?

When the legitimate sovereign appeared to be firmly seated on the throne again in 1818, the marquis asked himself what a man of seventy should do at court; and what duties, what office, he could discharge there? The noble and high-minded d'Esgrignon was fain to be content with the triumph of the Monarchy and religion, while he waited for the results of that un hoped-for, indecisive victory, which proved to be simply an armistice. He continued as before, lord-paramount of his salon, so felicitously named the Collection of Antiquities.

But when the victors of 1793 became the vanquished in their turn, the nickname given at first in jest began to be used in bitter earnest. The town was no more free than other country towns from the hatreds and jealousies bred of party spirit. Du Croisier, contrary to all expectation, married the rich old maid who had refused him at first; carrying her off from his rival, the darling of the aristocratic quarter, a certain chevalier whose illustrious name will be sufficiently hidden by suppressing it altogether, in accordance with the usage formerly adopted in the place itself, where he was known by his title only. He was "the chevalier" in the town, as the Comte

d'Artois was "monsieur" at court. Now, not only had that marriage produced a war after the provincial manner, in which all weapons are fair; it had hastened the separation of the great and little noblesse, of the aristocratic and bourgeois social elements, which had been united for a little space by the heavy weight of Napoleonic rule. After the pressure was removed, there followed that sudden revival of class divisions which did so much harm to the country.

The most national of all sentiments in France is vanity. The wounded vanity of the many induced a thirst for Equality; though, as the most ardent innovator will some day discover, Equality is an impossibility. The Royalists pricked the Liberals in the most sensitive spots, and this happened especially in the provinces, where either party accused the other of unspeakable atrocities. In those days the blackest deeds were done in politics, to secure public opinion on one side or another, to catch the votes of that public of fools which holds up hands for those that are clever enough to serve out weapons to them. It is very difficult in a country town to avoid a man-to-man conflict of this kind over interests or questions which in Paris appear in a more general and theoretical form, with the result that political combatants also rise to a higher level; M. Laffitte, for example, or M. Casimir Périer can respect M. de Villèle or M. de Peyronnet as a man. M. Laffitte, who drew the fire on the ministry, would have given them an asylum in his house if they had fled thither on the 29th of July, 1830. Benjamin Constant sent a copy of his work on Religion to the Vicomte de Chateaubriand, with a flattering letter acknowledging benefits received from the former minister.

In such warfare as this, waged ceremoniously and without rancor on the side of the Antiquities, while du Croisier's faction went so far as to use the poisoned weapons of savages—in this warfare the advantages of wit and delicate irony lay on the side of the nobles. But it should never be forgotten

that the wounds made by the tongue and the eyes, by gibe or slight, are the last of all to heal. When the chevalier turned his back on mixed society and intrenched himself on the Mons Sacer of aristocracy, his witticisms thenceforward were directed at du Croisier's salon ; he stirred up the fires of war, not knowing how far the spirit of revenge was to urge the rival faction. None but purists and loyal gentlemen and women sure one of another entered the Hôtel d'Esgrignon ; they committed no indiscretions of any kind ; they had their ideas, true or false, good or bad, noble or trivial, but there was nothing to laugh at in all this. If the Liberals meant to make the nobles ridiculous, they were obliged to fasten on the political actions of their opponents ; while the intermediate party, composed of officials and others who paid court to the higher powers, kept the nobles informed of all that was done and said in the Liberal camp, and much of it was abundantly laughable. Du Croisier's adherents smarted under a sense of inferiority, which increased their thirst for revenge.

In 1822, du Croisier put himself at the head of the manufacturing interest of the province, as the Marquis d'Esgrignon headed the noblesse. Each represented his party. But du Croisier, instead of giving himself out frankly for a man of the extreme Left, ostensibly adopted the opinions formulated at a later day by the 221 deputies.

By taking up this position, he could keep in touch with the magistrates and local officials and the capitalists of the department. Du Croisier's salon, a power at least equal to the salon d'Esgrignon, larger numerically, as well as younger and more energetic, made itself felt all over the countryside ; the Collection of Antiquities, on the other hand, remained inert, a passive appendage, as it were, of a central authority which was often embarrassed by its own partisans ; for not merely did they encourage the Government in a mistaken policy, but some of its most absurd and fatal blunders were made in consequence

of the pressure brought to bear upon it by the Conservative party.

The Liberals, so far, had never contrived to carry their candidate. The department declined to obey their command, knowing that du Croisier, if elected, would take his place on the Left Centre benches, and as far as possible to the Left. Du Croisier was in correspondence with the Brothers Keller, the bankers, the oldest of whom shone conspicuous among "the nineteen deputies of the Left," that phalanx made famous by the efforts of the entire Liberal press. This same M. Keller, moreover, was related by marriage to the Comte de Gondreville, a Constitutional peer who remained in favor with Louis XVIII. For these reasons, the Constitutional Opposition (as distinct from the liberal party) was always prepared to vote at the last moment, not for the candidate whom they professed to support, but for du Croisier, if that worthy could succeed in gaining a sufficient number of Royalist votes; but at every election du Croisier was regularly thrown out by the Royalists. The leaders of that party, taking their tone from the Marquis d'Esgrignon, had pretty thoroughly fathomed and gauged their man; and with each defeat, du Croisier and his party waxed more bitter. Nothing so effectually stirs up strife as the failure of some snare set with elaborate pains.

In 1822 there seemed to be a lull in hostilities which had been kept up with great spirit during the first four years of the Restoration. The salon du Croisier and the salon d'Esgrignon, having measured their strength and weakness, were in all probability waiting for opportunity, that Providence of party strife. Ordinary persons were content with the surface quiet which deceived the Government; but those who knew du Croisier better were well aware that the passion of revenge in him, as in all men whose whole life consists in mental activity, is implacable, especially when political ambitions are involved. About this time du Croisier, who used to turn white and red at the bare mention of d'Esgrignon or the chevalier, and

shuddered at the name of the Collection of Antiquities, chose to wear the impassive countenance of a savage. He smiled upon his enemies, hating them but the more deeply, watching them the more narrowly from hour to hour. One of his own party, who seconded him in these calculations of cold wrath, was the president of the Tribunal, M. du Ronceret, a little country squire, who had vainly endeavored to gain admittance among the Antiquities.

The d'Esgrignons' little fortune, carefully administered by Maître Chesnel, was barely sufficient for the worthy marquis' needs; for though he lived without the slightest ostentation, he also lived like a noble. The governor found by his lordship the bishop for the hope of the house, the young Comte Victurnien d'Esgrignon, was an elderly Oratorian who must be paid a certain salary, although he lived with the family. The wages of a cook, a waiting-woman for Mlle. Armande, an old valet for M. le Marquis, and a couple of other servants, together with the daily expenses of the household, and the cost of an education for which nothing was spared, absorbed the whole family income, in spite of Mlle. Armande's economies, in spite of Chesnel's careful management, and the servants' affection. As yet, Chesnel had not been able to set about repairs at the ruined castle; he was waiting till the leases fell in to raise the rent of the farms, for rents had been rising lately, partly on account of improved methods of agriculture, partly by the fall in the value of money, of which the landlord would get the benefit at the expiration of leases granted in 1809.

The marquis himself knew nothing of the details of the management of the house or of his property. He would have been thunderstruck if he had been told of the excessive precautions needed "to make both ends of the year meet in December," to use the housewife's saying, and he was so near the end of his life that every one shrank from opening his eyes. The marquis and his adherents believed that a House, to

which no one at Court or in the Government gave a thought, a House that was never heard of beyond the gates of the town, save here and there in the same department, was about to revive its ancient greatness, to shine forth in all its glory. The d'Esgrignons' line should reappear with renewed lustre in the person of Victurnien, just as the despoiled nobles came into their own again, and the handsome heir to a great estate would be in a position to go to Court, enter the King's service, and marry (as other d'Esgrignons had done before him) a Navarreins, a Cadignan, a d'Uxelles, a Beauséant, a Blamont-Chauvry; a wife, in short, who should unite all the distinctions of birth and beauty, wit and health, and character.

The intimates who came to play their game of cards of an evening—the Troisvilles (pronounced Tréville), the La Roche-Guyons, the Castérans (pronounced Catéran), and the Duc de Verneuil—had all so long been accustomed to look up to the marquis as a person of immense consequence, that they encouraged him in such notions as these. They were perfectly sincere in their belief; and, indeed, it would have been well founded if they could have wiped out the history of the last forty years. But the most honorable and undoubted sanctions of right, such as Louis XVIII. had tried to set on record when he dated the Charter from the one-and-twentieth year of his reign, only exist when ratified by the general consent. The d'Esgrignons not only lacked the very rudiments of the language of latter-day politics, to wit, money, the great modern *relief*, or sufficient rehabilitation of nobility; but, in their case, too, "historical continuity" was lacking, and that is a kind of renown which tells quite as much at Court as on the battlefield, in diplomatic circles as in Parliament, with a book, or in connection with an adventure; it is, as it were, a sacred *ampulla* poured upon the heads of each successive generation. Whereas a noble family, inactive and forgotten, is very much in the position of a hard-featured, poverty-stricken, simple-minded, and virtuous maid, these qualifications being the four

cardinal points of misfortune. The marriage of a daughter of the Troisvilles with General Montcornet, so far from opening the eyes of the Antiquities, very nearly brought about a rupture between the Troisvilles and the salon d'Esgrignon, the latter declaring that the Troisvilles were mixing themselves up with all sorts of people.

There was one, and one only, among all these people who did not share their illusions. And that one, needless to say, was Chesnel the notary. Although his devotion, sufficiently proved already, was simply unbounded for the great house now reduced to three persons; although he accepted all their ideas, and thought them nothing less than right, he had too much commonsense, he was too good a man of business to more than half the families in the department, to miss the significance of the great changes that were taking place in people's minds, or to be blind to the different conditions brought about by industrial development and modern manners. He had watched the Revolution pass through the violent phase of 1793, when men, women, and children wore arms, and heads fell on the scaffold, and victories were won in pitched battles with Europe; and now he saw the same forces quietly at work in men's minds, in the shape of ideas which sanctioned the issues. The soil had been cleared, the seed sown, and now came the harvest. To his thinking, the Revolution had formed the mind of the younger generation; he touched the hard facts, and knew that although there were countless unhealed wounds, what had been done was done past recall. The death of a king on the scaffold, the protracted agony of a queen, the division of the nobles' lands, in his eyes were so many binding contracts; and where so many vested interests were involved, it was not likely that those concerned would allow them to be attacked. Chesnel saw clearly. His fanatical attachment to the d'Esgrignons was whole-hearted, but it was not blind, and it was all the fairer for this. The young monk's faith that sees heaven laid open and beholds the

angels is something far below the power of the old monk who points them out to him. The ex-steward was like the old monk ; he would have given his life to defend a worm-eaten shrine.

He tried to explain the "innovations" to his old master, using a thousand tactful precautions ; sometimes speaking jestingly, sometimes affecting surprise or sorrow over this or that ; but he always met the same prophetic smile on the marquis' lips, the same fixed conviction in the marquis' mind, that these follies would go by like others. Events contributed in a way which has escaped attention to assist such noble champions of forlorn hopes to cling to their superstitions. What could Chesnel do when the old marquis said, with a lordly gesture : "God swept away Bonaparte with his armies, his new great vassals, his crowned kings, and his vast conceptions ! God will deliver us from the rest." And Chesnel hung his head sadly, and did not dare to answer : "It cannot be God's will to sweep away France." Yet both of them were grand figures ; the one, standing out against the torrent of facts like an ancient block of lichen-covered granite, still upright in the depths of an Alpine gorge ; the other, watching the course of the flood to turn it to account. Then the good gray-headed notary would groan over the irreparable havoc which these superstitions were sure to work in the mind, the habits, and ideas of the Comte Victurnien d'Esgrignon.

Idolized by his father, idolized by his aunt, the young heir was a spoilt child in every sense of the word ; but still a spoilt child who justified paternal and maternal illusions. Maternal, be it said, for Victurnien's aunt was truly a mother to him ; and yet, however careful and tender she may be that never bore a child, there is a something lacking in her motherhood. A mother's second-sight cannot be acquired. An aunt, bound to her nursing by ties of such a pure affection as united Mlle. Armande to Victurnien, may love as much as a mother might ; may be as careful, as kind, as tender, as indulgent, but she lacks the mother's instinctive knowledge when and how to be

severe ; she has no sudden warnings, none of the uneasy presentiments of the mother's heart ; for a mother, bound to her child from the beginnings of life by all the fibres of her being, is still conscious of the communication, still vibrates with the shock of every trouble, and thrills with every joy in the child's life as if it were her own. If Nature has made of woman, physically speaking, a neutral ground, it has not been forbidden to her, under certain conditions, to identify herself completely with her offspring. When she has not merely given life, but given of her whole life, you behold that wonderful, unexplained, and inexplicable thing—the love of a woman for one of her children above the others. The outcome of this story is one more proof of a proven truth—a mother's place cannot be filled. A mother foresees danger long before a Mlle. Armande can admit the possibility of it, even if the mischief is done. The one prevents the evil, the other remedies it. And beside, in the maiden's motherhood there is an element of blind adoration, she cannot bring herself to scold a beautiful boy.

A practical knowledge of life and the experience of business had taught the old notary a habit of distrustful, clear-sighted observation something akin to the mother's instinct. But Chesnel counted for so little in the house (especially since he had fallen into something like disgrace over that unlucky project of a marriage between a d'Esgrignon and a du Croisier), that he had made up his mind to adhere blindly in future to the family doctrines. He was a common soldier ; faithful to his post, and ready to give his life ; it was never likely that they would take his advice, even in the height of the storm ; unless chance should bring him, like the King's bedesman in "The Antiquary," to the edge of the sea, when the old baronet and his daughter were caught by the high tide.

Du Croisier caught a glimpse of his revenge in the anomalous education given to the lad. He hoped, to quote the expressive words of the author quoted above, "to drown the lamb

in its mother's milk." *This* was the hope which had produced his taciturn resignation and brought that savage smile on his lips.

The young Comte Victurnien was taught to believe in his own supremacy so soon as an idea could enter his head. All the great nobles of the realm were his peers, his one superior was the King, and the rest of mankind were his inferiors, people with whom he had nothing in common, toward whom he had no duties. They were defeated and conquered enemies, whom he need not take into account for a moment; their opinions could not affect a noble, and they all owed him respect. Unluckily, with the rigorous logic of youth, which leads children and young people to proceed to extremes whether good or bad, Victurnien pushed these conclusions to their utmost consequences. His own external advantages, moreover, confirmed him in his beliefs. He had been extraordinarily beautiful as a child; he became as accomplished a young man as any father could wish.

Personal beauty has this in common with noble birth, it cannot be acquired afterward; it is everywhere recognized, and often is more valued than either money or brains; beauty has only to appear and triumph; nobody asks more of beauty than that it should simply exist.

Fate had endowed Victurnien, over and above the privileges of good looks and noble birth, with a high spirit, a wonderful aptitude of comprehension, and a good memory. His education, therefore, had been complete. He knew a good deal more than is usually known by young provincial nobles, who develop into highly distinguished sportsmen, owners of land, and consumers of tobacco; and are put to treat art, sciences, letters, poetry, or anything offensively above their intellects cavalierly enough. Such gifts of nature and education surely would one day realize the Marquis d'Esgrignon's ambitions; he already saw his son a Marshal of France if Victurnien's tastes were for the army; an ambassador if diplomacy held any at-

tractions for him ; a cabinet minister if that career seemed good in his eyes ; every place in the State belonged to Victurnien. And, most gratifying thought of all for a father, the young count would have made his way in the world by his own merits even if he had not been a d'Esgrignon.

All through his happy childhood and golden youth, Victurnien had never met with opposition to his wishes. He had been the king of the house ; no one curbed the little prince's will ; and naturally he grew up insolent and audacious, selfish as a prince, self-willed as the most high-spirited cardinal of the Middle Ages—defects of character which any one might guess from his qualities, essentially those of the noble.

The chevalier was a man of the good old times when the Gray Musketeers were the terror of the Paris theatres, when they horsewhipped the watch and drubbed servers of writs, and played a host of page's pranks, at which majesty was wont to smile so long as they were amusing. This charming deceiver and hero of the *ruelles* had no small share in bringing about the disasters which afterward befell. The amiable old gentleman, with nobody to understand him, was not a little pleased to find a budding Faublas, who looked the part to admiration, and put him in mind of his own young days. So, making no allowance for the difference of the times, he sowed the maxims of a *roué* of the Encyclopædic period broadcast in the boy's mind. He told wicked anecdotes of the reign of his majesty Louis XV. ; he glorified the manners and customs of the year 1750 ; he told of the orgies in *petites maisons* (little houses—abodes of mistresses), the follies of courtesans, the capital tricks played on creditors, the manners, in short, which furnished forth Dancourt's comedies and Beaumarchais' epigrams. And unfortunately, the corruption lurking beneath the utmost polish tricked itself out in Voltairean wit. If the chevalier went rather too far at times, he always added as a corrective that a man must always behave himself like a gentleman.

Of all this discourse, Victurnien comprehended just so much

as flattered his passions. From the first he saw his old father laughing with the chevalier. The two elderly men considered that the pride of a d'Esgrignon was a sufficient safeguard against anything unbefitting; as for a dishonorable action, no one in the house imagined that a d'Esgrignon could be guilty of it. HONOR, the great principle of Monarchy, was planted firm like a beacon in the hearts of the family; it lighted up the least action, it kindled the least thought of a d'Esgrignon. "A d'Esgrignon ought not to permit himself to do such and such a thing, he bears a name, which pledges him to make the future worthy of the past"—a noble teaching which should have been sufficient in itself to keep alive the tradition of noblesse—had been, as it were, the burden of Victurnien's cradle song. He heard them from the old marquis, from Mlle. Armande, from Chesnel, from the intimates of the house. And so it came to pass that good and evil met, and in equal forces, in the boy's soul.

At the age of eighteen, Victurnien went into society. He noticed some slight discrepancies between the outer world of the town and the inner world of the Hôtel d'Esgrignon, but he in no wise tried to seek the causes of them. And, indeed, the causes were to be found in Paris. He had yet to learn that the men who spoke their minds out so boldly in evening talk with his father were extremely careful of what they said in the presence of the hostile persons with whom their interests compelled them to mingle. His own father had won the right of freedom of speech. Nobody dreamed of contradicting an old man of seventy, and beside, every one was willing to overlook fidelity to the old order of things in a man who had been violently despoiled.

Victurnien was deceived by appearances, and his behavior set up the backs of the townspeople. In his impetuous way he tried to carry matters with too high a hand over some difficulties in the way of sport, which ended in formidable lawsuits, hushed up by Chesnel for money paid down. Nobody

dared to tell the marquis of these things. You may judge of his astonishment if he had heard that his son had been prosecuted for shooting over his lands, his domains, his covers, under the reign of a son of St. Louis! People were too much afraid of the possible consequences to tell him about such trifles, Chesnel said.

The young count indulged in other escapades in the town. These the chevalier regarded as "*amourettes*," but they cost Chesnel something considerable in portions for forsaken damsels seduced under imprudent promises of marriage: yet other cases there were which came under an article of the Code as to the abduction of minors; and but for Chesnel's timely intervention, the new law would have been allowed to take its brutal course, and it is hard to say where the count might have ended. Victurnien grew the bolder for these victories over bourgeois justice. He was so accustomed to be pulled out of scrapes, that he never thought twice before any prank. Courts of law, in his opinion, were bugbears to frighten people, but had no hold on him. Things which he would have blamed in common people were for him only pardonable amusements. His disposition to treat the new laws cavalierly while obeying the maxims of a Code for aristocrats, his behavior and character, were all pondered, analyzed, and tested by a few adroit persons in du Croisier's interests. These people supported each other in the effort to make the people believe that Liberal slanders were revelations, and that the Ministerial policy at bottom meant a return to the old order of things.

What a bit of luck to find something by way of proof of their assertions! President du Ronceret, and the public prosecutor likewise, lent themselves admirably, so far as was compatible with their duty as magistrates, to the design of letting off the offender as easily as possible; indeed, they went deliberately out of their way to do this, well-pleased to raise a Liberal clamor against their overlarge concessions.

And so, while seeming to serve the interests of the d'Esgrignons, they stirred up ill feeling against them. The treacherous du Ronceret had it in his mind to pose as incorruptible at the right moment over some serious charge, with public opinion to back him up. The young count's worst tendencies, moreover, were insidiously encouraged by two or three young men who followed in his train, paid court to him, won his favor, and flattered and obeyed him, with a view to confirming his belief in a noble's supremacy; and all this at a time when a noble's one chance of preserving his power lay in using it with the utmost discretion for half a century to come.

Du Croisier hoped to reduce the d'Esgrignons to the last extremity of poverty; he hoped to see their castle demolished, and their lands sold piecemeal by auction, through the follies which this hare-brained boy was pretty certain to commit. This was as far as he went; he did not think, with President du Ronceret, that Victurnien was likely to give justice another kind of hold upon him. Both men found an ally for their schemes of revenge in Victurnien's overweening vanity and love of pleasure. President du Ronceret's son, a lad of seventeen, was admirably fitted for the part of instigator. He was one of the count's companions, a new kind of spy in du Croisier's pay; du Croisier taught him his lesson, set him to track down the noble and beautiful boy through his better qualities, and sardonically prompted him to encourage his victim in his worst faults. Fabien du Ronceret was a sophisticated youth, to whom such a mystification was attractive; he had precisely the keen brain and envious nature which finds in such a pursuit as this the absorbing amusement which a man of an ingenious turn lacks in the provinces.

In three years, between the ages of eighteen and one-and-twenty, Victurnien cost poor Chesnel nearly eighty thousand francs! And this without the knowledge of Mlle. Armande or the marquis. More than half of the money had been spent in buying off lawsuits; the lad's extravagance had squandered

the rest. Of the marquis' income of ten thousand livres, five thousand were necessary for the housekeeping; two thousand more represented Mlle. Armande's allowance (parsimonious though she was) and the marquis' expenses. The handsome young heir-presumptive, therefore, had not a hundred louis to spend. And what sort of figure can a man make on two thousand livres? Victurnien's tailor's bills alone absorbed his whole allowance. He had his linen, his clothes, gloves, and perfumery from Paris. He wanted a good English saddle-horse, a tilbury, and a second horse. M. du Croisier had a tilbury and a thoroughbred. Was the bourgeoisie to cut out the noblesse? Then, the young count must have a man in the d'Esgrignon livery. He prided himself on setting the fashion among young men in the town and the department; he entered that world of luxuries and fancies which suit youth and good looks and wit so well. Chesnel paid for it all, not without using, like ancient parliaments, the right of protest, albeit he spoke with angelic kindness.

"What a pity it is that so good a man should be so tiresome!" Victurnien would say to himself every time that the notary stanchd some wound in his purse.

Chesnel had been left a widower, and childless; he had taken his old master's son to fill the void in his heart. It was a pleasure to him to watch the lad driving up the High Street, perched aloft on the box-seat of the tilbury, whip in hand, and a rose in his button-hole, handsome, well turned out, envied by every one.

Pressing need would bring Victurnien with uneasy eyes and coaxing manner, but steady voice, to the modest house in the Rue du Bercaill; there had been losses at cards at the Trois-villes, or the Duc de Verneuil's, or the prefecture, or the receiver-general's, and the count had come to his providence, the notary. He had only to show himself to carry the day.

"Well, what is it, Monsieur le Comte? What has happened?" the old man would ask, with a tremor in his voice.

On great occasions Victurnien would sit down, assume a melancholy, pensive expression, and submit with little coquetries of voice and gesture to be questioned. Then when he had thoroughly roused the old man's fears (for Chesnel was beginning to fear how such a course of extravagance would end), he would own up to a peccadillo which a bill for a thousand francs would absolve. Chesnel possessed a private income of some twelve thousand livres, but the fund was not inexhaustible. The eighty thousand francs thus squandered represented his savings, accumulated for the day when the marquis should send his son to Paris, or open negotiations for a wealthy marriage.

Chesnel was clear-sighted so long as Victurnien was not there before him. One by one he lost the illusions which the marquis and his sister still fondly cherished. He saw that the young fellow could not be depended upon in the least, and wished to see him married to some modest, sensible girl of good birth, wondering within himself how a young man could mean so well and do so ill, for he made promises one day only to break them all on the next.

But there is never any good to be expected of young men who confess their sins and repent, and straightway fall into them again. A man of strong character only confesses his faults to himself, and punishes himself for them; as for the weak, they drop back into the old ruts when they find that the bank is too steep to climb. The springs of pride which lie in a great man's secret soul had been slackened in Victurnien. With such guardians as he had, such company as he kept, such a life as he had led, he had suddenly become an enervated voluptuary at that turning-point in his life when a man most stands in need of the harsh discipline of misfortune and poverty to bring out the strength that is in him, the pinch of adversity which formed a Prince Eugène, a Frederick II., a Napoleon. Chesnel saw that Victurnien possessed that uncontrollable appetite for enjoyments which should be the pre-

rogative of men endowed with giant powers; the men who feel the need of counterbalancing their gigantic labors by pleasures which bring one-sided mortals to the pit.

At times the good man stood aghast; then, again, some profound sally, some sign of the lad's remarkable range of intellect, would reassure him. He would say, as the marquis said at the rumor of some escapade: "Boys will be boys." Chesnel had spoken to the chevalier, lamenting the young lord's propensity for getting into debt; but the chevalier manipulated his pinch of snuff, and listened with a smile of amusement.

"My dear Chesnel, just explain to me what a national debt is," he answered. "If France has debts, egad! why should not Victurnien have debts? At this time and at all times princes have debts, every gentleman has debts. Perhaps you would rather that Victurnien should bring you his savings? Do you know what our great Richelieu (not the cardinal, a pitiful fellow that put nobles to death, but the *maréchal*), do you know what he did once when his grandson the Prince de Chinon, the last of the line, let him see that he had not spent his pocket-money at the University?"

"No, Monsieur le Chevalier."

"Oh, well; he flung the purse out of the window to a sweeper in the courtyard, and said to his grandson: 'Then they do not teach you to be a prince here?'"

Chesnel bent his head and made no answer. But that night, as he lay awake, he thought that such doctrines as these were fatal in times when there was one law for everybody, and foresaw the first beginnings of the ruin of the d'Esgrignons.

But for these explanations which depict one side of provincial life in the time of the Empire and the Restoration, it would not be easy to understand the opening scene of this history, an incident which took place in the great salon one evening toward

the end of October, 1822. The card-tables were forsaken, the Collection of Antiquities—elderly nobles, elderly countesses, young marquises, and simple baronesses—had settled their losses and winnings. The master of the house was pacing up and down the room, while Mlle. Armande was putting out the candles on the card-tables. He was not taking exercise alone, the chevalier was with him, and the two wrecks of the eighteenth century were talking of Victurnien. The chevalier had undertaken to broach the subject with the marquis.

“Yes, marquis,” he was saying, “your son is wasting his time and his youth; you ought to send him to Court.”

“I have always thought,” said the marquis, “that if my great age prevents me from going to Court—where, between ourselves, I do not know what I should do among all these new people whom his majesty receives, and all that is going on there—that if I could not go myself, I could at least send my son to present our homage to his majesty. The King surely would do something for the count—give him a company, for instance, or a place in the Household, a chance, in short, for the boy to win his spurs. My uncle the archbishop suffered a cruel martyrdom; I have fought for the cause without deserting the camp with those who thought it their duty to follow the princes. I held that while the King was in France his nobles should rally round him. Ah! well, no one gives us a thought; a Henri IV. would have written before now to the d’Esgrignons, ‘Come to me, my friends; we have won the day!’ After all, we are something better than the Troisvilles, yet here are two Troisvilles made peers of France; and another, I hear, represents the nobles in the Chamber.” (He took the upper electoral colleges for assemblies of his own order.) “Really, they think no more of us than if we did not exist. I was waiting for the princes to make their journey through this part of the world; but as the princes do not come to us, we must go to the princes.”

“I am enchanted to learn that you think of introducing our

dear Victurnien into society," the chevalier put in adroitly. "He ought not to bury his talents in a hole like this town. The best fortune that he can look for here is to come across some Norman girl" (mimicking the accent), "country-bred, stupid, and rich. What could he make of her?—his wife? Oh! good Lord!"

"I sincerely hope that he will defer his marriage until he has obtained some great office or appointment under the Crown," returned the gray-haired marquis. "Still, there are serious difficulties in the way."

And these were the only difficulties which the marquis saw at the outset of his son's career.

"My son, the Comte d'Esgrignon, cannot make his appearance at court like a tatterdemalion," he continued after a pause, marked by a sigh; "he must be equipped. Alas! for these two hundred years we have had no retainers. Ah! chevalier, this demolition from top to bottom always brings me back to the first hammer-stroke delivered by Monsieur de Mirabeau. The one thing needful nowadays is money; that is all that the Revolution has done that I can see. The King does not ask you whether you are a descendant of the Valois or a conqueror of Gaul; he asks whether you pay a thousand francs in *tailles* which nobles never used to pay. So I cannot well send the count to Court without a matter of twenty thousand crowns——"

"Yes," assented the chevalier, "with that trifling sum he could cut a brave figure."

"Well," said Mlle. Armande, "I have asked Chesnel to come to-night. Would you believe it, chevalier, ever since the day when Chesnel proposed that I should marry that miserable du Croisier——"

"Ah! that was truly unworthy, mademoiselle!" cried the chevalier.

"Unpardonable!" said the marquis.

"Well, since then my brother has never brought himself

to ask anything whatsoever of Monsieur Chesnel," continued Mlle. Armande.

"Of your old household servant? Why, marquis, you would do Chesnel honor—an honor which he would gratefully remember till his latest breath."

"No," said the marquis, "the thing is beneath one's dignity, it seems to me."

"There is not much question of dignity; it is a matter of necessity," said the chevalier, with the trace of a shrug.

"Never," said the marquis, riposting with a gesture which decided the chevalier to risk a great stroke to open his old friend's eyes.

"Very well," he said, "since you do not know it, I will tell you myself that Chesnel has let your son have something already, something like——"

"My son is incapable of accepting anything whatever from Chesnel," the marquis broke in, drawing himself up as he spoke. "He might have asked *you* for twenty-five louis——"

"Something like a hundred thousand livres," said the chevalier, finishing his sentence.

"The Comte d'Esgrignon owes a hundred thousand livres to a Chesnel!" cried the marquis, with every sign of deep pain. "Oh! if he were not an only son, he should set out to-night for Mexico with a captain's commission. A man may be in debt to money-lenders, they charge a heavy interest, and you are quits; that is right enough; but *Chesnel!* a man to whom one is attached!——"

"Yes, our adorable Victurnien has run through a hundred thousand livres, dear marquis," resumed the chevalier, flicking a trace of snuff from his vest; "it is not much, I know. I myself at his age—— But, after all, let us leave old memories, marquis. The count is living in the provinces; all things taken into consideration, it is not so much amiss. He will go far; these irregularities are common in men who do great things afterward——"

"And he is sleeping upstairs, without a word of this to his father," exclaimed the marquis.

"Sleeping innocently as a child who has merely got five or six little bourgeois into trouble, and now must have duchesses," returned the chevalier.

"Why, he deserves a *lettre de cachet*!"

"They' have done away with *lettres de cachet*,"* said the chevalier. "You know what a hubbub there was when they tried to institute a law for special cases. We could not keep the provost's courts, which Monsieur de Bonaparte used to call *commissions militaires*."

"Well, well; what are we to do if our boys are wild or turn out scapegraces? Is there no locking them up in these days?" asked the marquis.

The chevalier looked at the heart-broken father and lacked courage to answer: "We shall be obliged to bring them up properly."

"And you have never said a word of this to me, Mademoiselle d'Esgrignon," added the marquis, turning suddenly round upon Mlle. Armande. He never addressed her as Mlle. d'Esgrignon except when he was vexed; usually she was called "my sister."

"Why, monsieur, when a young man is full of life and spirits, and leads an idle life in a town like this, what else can you expect?" asked Mlle. d'Esgrignon. She could not understand her brother's anger.

"Debts! eh! why, hang it all!" added the chevalier. "He plays cards, he has little adventures, he shoots—all these things are horribly expensive nowadays."

"Come," said the marquis, "it is time to send him to the King. I will spend to-morrow morning in writing to our kinsmen."

"I have some acquaintance with the Ducs de Navarreins, de Lenoncourt, de Maufrigneuse, and de Chaulieu," said the

* An arbitrary warrant of imprisonment sealed with the king's *cachet*—seal.

chevalier, though he knew, as he spoke, that he was pretty thoroughly forgotten.

"My dear chevalier, there is no need of such formalities to present a d'Esgrignon at Court," the marquis broke in. "A hundred thousand livres," he muttered; "this Chesnel makes very free. This is what comes of these accursed troubles. Mons. Chesnel protects my son. And now I must ask him—No, sister, you must undertake this business. Chesnel shall secure himself for the whole amount by a mortgage on our lands. And just give this hare-brained boy a good scolding; he will end by ruining himself if he goes on like this."

The chevalier and Mlle. d'Esgrignon thought these words perfectly simple and natural, absurd as they would have sounded to any other listener. So far from seeing anything ridiculous in the speech, they were both very much touched by a look of something like anguish in the old noble's face.

Just then the Marquis d'Esgrignon looked exactly as any imagination with a touch of romance could wish. He was almost bald, but a fringe of silken, white locks, curled at the tips, covered the back of his head. All the pride of race might be seen in a noble forehead, such as you may admire in a Louis XV., a Beaumarchais, a Maréchal de Richelieu; it was not the square, broad brow of the portraits of the Maréchal de Saxe; nor yet the small, hard circle of Voltaire, compact to overfulness; it was graciously rounded and finely moulded, the temples were ivory-tinted and soft; and mettle and spirit, unquenched by age, flashed from the brilliant eyes. The marquis had the Condé nose and the lovable Bourbon mouth, from which, as they used to say of the Comte d'Artois, only witty and urbane words proceed. His cheeks, sloping rather than foolishly rounded to the chin, were in keeping with his spare frame, thin legs, and plump hands. The strangulation cravat at his throat was of the kind which every marquis wears in all the portraits which adorn eighteenth-century literature; it is common alike to Saint-Preux and to Lovelace, to the

elegant Montesquieu's heroes and to Diderot's homespun characters (see the first editions of those writers' works).

The marquis always wore a white, gold-embroidered, high vest, with the red ribbon of a commander of the Order of St. Louis blazing upon his breast; and a blue coat with wide skirts, and fleurs-de-lys on the flaps, which were turned back—an odd costume which the King had adopted. But the marquis could not bring himself to give up the Frenchman's knee-breeches nor yet the white silk stockings or the buckles at the knees. After six o'clock in the evening he appeared in full dress.

He read no newspapers but the "*Quotidienne*" and the "*Gazette de France*," two journals accused by the Constitutional press of obscurantist views and uncoun-
ted "monarchical and religious" enormities; while the Marquis d'Esgrignon, on the other hand, found heresies and revolutionary doctrines in every issue.

The Marquis d'Esgrignon rested his elbows on his knees and leaned his head on his hands. During his meditations Mlle. Armande and the chevalier looked at one another without uttering the thoughts in their minds. Was he pained by the discovery that his son's future must depend upon his sometime land-steward? Was he doubtful of the reception awaiting the young count? Did he regret that he had made no preparation for launching his heir into that brilliant world of court? Poverty had kept him in the depths of his province; how should he have appeared at Court? He sighed heavily as he raised his head.

That sigh, in those days, came from the real aristocracy all over France; from the loyal provincial noblesse, consigned to neglect with most of those who had drawn sword and braved the storm for the cause.

"What have the princes done for the du Guénics, or the Fontaines, or the Bauvans, who never submitted?" he muttered to himself. "They fling miserable pensions to the

men who fought most bravely, and give them a royal lieutenancy in a fortress somewhere on the outskirts of the kingdom."

Evidently the marquis doubted the reigning dynasty. Mlle. d'Esgrignon was trying to reassure her brother as to the prospects of the journey, when a step outside on the dry, narrow footway gave them notice of Chesnel's coming. In another moment Chesnel appeared; Joséphin, the count's gray-haired valet, admitted the notary without announcing him.

"Chesnel, my boy——" (Chesnel was a white-haired man of sixty-nine, with a square-jawed, venerable countenance; he wore knee-breeches, ample enough to fill several chapters of dissertation in the manner of Sterne, ribbed stockings, shoes with silver clasps, an ecclesiastical-looking coat and a high vest of scholastic cut.

"Chesnel, my boy, it was very presumptuous of you to lend money to the Comte d'Esgrignon! If I repaid you at once and we never saw each other again, it would be no more than you deserve for giving wings to his vices."

There was a pause, a silence such as there falls at Court when the King publicly reprimands a courtier. The old notary looked humble and contrite.

"I am anxious about that boy, Chesnel," continued the marquis in a kindly tone; "I should like to send him to Paris to serve his majesty. Make arrangements with my sister for his suitable appearance at Court. And we will settle accounts——"

The marquis looked grave as he left the room with a friendly gesture of farewell to Chesnel.

"I thank Monsieur le Marquis for all his goodness," returned the old man, who still remained standing.

Mlle. Armande rose to go to the door with her brother; she had rung the bell, old Joséphin was in readiness to light his master to his room.

"Take a seat, Chesnel," said the lady, as she returned, and with womanly tact she explained away and softened the marquis' harshness. And yet beneath that harshness Chesnel saw a great affection. The marquis' attachment for his old servant was something of the same order as a man's affection for his dog; he will fight any one who kicks the animal, the dog is like a part of his existence, a something which, if not exactly himself, represents him in that which is nearest and dearest—his sensibilities.

"It is quite time that Monsieur le Comte should be sent away from the town, mademoiselle," he said sententiously.

"Yes," returned she. "Has he been indulging in some new escapade?"

"No, mademoiselle."

"Well, why do you blame him?"

"I am not blaming him, mademoiselle. No, I am not blaming him. I am very far from blaming him. I will even say that I shall never blame him, whatever he may do."

There was a pause. The chevalier, nothing if not quick to take in a situation, began to yawn like a sleep-ridden mortal. Gracefully he made his excuses and went, with as little mind to sleep as to go and drown himself. The imp Curiosity kept the chevalier wide awake, and with airy fingers plucked away the cotton-batting from his ears.

"Well, Chesnel, is it something new?" Mlle. Armande began anxiously.

"Yes, things that cannot be told to Monsieur le Marquis; he would drop down in an apoplectic fit."

"Speak out," she said. With her beautiful head leant on the back of her low chair and her arms extended listlessly by her side, she looked as if she were waiting passively for her death-blow.

"Mademoiselle, Monsieur le Comte, with all his cleverness, is a plaything in the hands of mean creatures, petty natures on the lookout for a crushing revenge. They want to ruin us

and bring us low! There is the president of the Tribunal, Monsieur du Ronceret; he has, as you know, a very great notion of his descent——”

“His grandfather was an attorney,” interposed Mlle. Armande.

“I know he was. And for that reason you have not received him; nor does he go to Monsieur de Troisville’s, nor to le Duc de Verneuil’s, nor to the Marquis de Castéran’s; but he is one of the pillars of du Croisier’s salon. Your nephew may rub shoulders with young Fabien du Ronceret without condescending too far, for he must have companions of his own age. Well and good. That young fellow is at the bottom of all Monsieur le Comte’s follies; he and two or three of the rest of them belong to the other side, the side of Monsieur le Chevalier’s enemy, who does nothing but breathe threats of vengeance against you and all the nobles together. They all hope to ruin you through your nephew. The ring-leader of the conspiracy is this sycophant of a du Croisier, the pretended Royalist. Du Croisier’s wife, poor thing, knows nothing about it; you know her, I should have heard of it before this if she had ears to hear evil. For some time these wild young fellows were not in the secret, nor was anybody else; but the ringleaders let something drop in jest, and then the fools got to know about it, and after the count’s recent escapades they let fall some words while they were drunk. And those words were carried to me by others who are sorry to see such a fine, handsome, noble, charming lad ruining himself with pleasure. So far people feel sorry for him; before many days are over they will—I am afraid to say what, but——”

“They will despise him; say it out, Chesnel!” Mlle. Armande cried piteously.

“Ah! How can you keep the best people in the town from finding out faults in their neighbors? They do not know what to do with themselves from morning to night. And so

Monsieur le Comte's losses at play are all reckoned up. Thirty thousand francs have taken flight during these two months, and everybody wonders where he gets the money. If they mention it when I am present, I just call them to order. Ah! but—— ‘Do you suppose’ (I told them this morning), ‘do you suppose that if the d’Esgrignon family have lost their manorial rights, that therefore they have been robbed of their hoard of treasure? The young count has a right to do as he pleases; and so long as he does not owe you a sol, you have no right to say a word.’”

Mlle. Armande held out her hand, and the notary kissed it respectfully.

“Good Chesnel! But, my friend, how shall we find the money for this journey? Victurnien must appear as befits his rank at Court.”

“Oh! I have borrowed money on Le Jard, mademoiselle.”

“What? You had nothing left! Ah, heaven! what can we do to reward you?”

“You can take the hundred thousand francs which I hold at your disposal. You can understand that the loan was negotiated in confidence, so that it might not reflect on you; for it is known in the town that I am closely connected with the d’Esgrignon family.”

Tears came into Mlle. Armande's eyes. Chesnel saw them, took a fold of the noble woman's dress in his hands, and kissed it.

“Never mind,” he said, “a lad must sow his wild oats. In great salons in Paris his boyish ideas will take a new turn. And, really, though our old friends here are the worthiest people in the world, and no one could have nobler hearts than they, they are not amusing. If Monsieur le Comte wants amusement, he is obliged to look below his rank, and he will end by getting into low company.”

Next day the old traveling coach saw the light, and was sent to be put in repair. In a solemn interview after break-

fast, the hope of the house was duly informed of his father's intentions regarding him—he was to go to Court and ask to serve his majesty. He would have time during the journey to make up his mind about his career. The navy or the army, the privy council, an embassy, or the royal household—all were open to a d'Esgrignon, a d'Esgrignon had only to choose. The King would certainly look favorably upon the d'Esgrignons, because they had asked nothing of him, and had sent the youngest representative of their house to receive the recognition of majesty.

But young d'Esgrignon, with all his wild pranks, had guessed instinctively what society in Paris meant, and formed his own opinions of life. So, when they talked of his leaving the country and the paternal roof, he listened with a grave countenance to his revered parent's lecture, and refrained from giving him a good deal of information in reply. As, for instance, that young men no longer went into the army or the navy as they used to do; that if a man had a mind to be a second lieutenant in a cavalry regiment without passing through a special training in the *Écoles*, he must first serve in the Cadets; that sons of the greatest houses went exactly like commoners to Saint-Cyr and the Polytechnic, and took their chances of being beaten by base blood. If he had enlightened his relatives on these points, funds might not have been forthcoming for a stay in Paris; so he allowed his father and Aunt Armande to believe that he would be permitted a seat in the King's carriages, that he must support his dignity at Court as the d'Esgrignons of the time, and rub shoulders with great lords of the realm.

It grieved the marquis that he could send but one servant with his son; but he gave him his own old valet Joséphin, a man who could be trusted to take care of his young master, and to watch faithfully over his interests. The poor father must do without Joséphin, and hope to replace him with a young lad.

"Remember that you are a Carol, my boy," he said; "re-

member that you come of an unalloyed descent, and that your escutcheon bears the motto *Cil est nostre*; with such arms you may hold your head high everywhere, and aspire to queens. Render grace to your father, as I to mine. We owe it to the honor of our ancestors, kept stainless until now, that we can look all men in the face, and need bend the knee to none save a mistress, the King, and God. This is the greatest of your privileges."

Chesnel, good man, was breakfasting with the family. He took no part in counsels based on heraldry, nor in the inditing of letters addressed to divers mighty personages of the day; but he had spent the night in writing to an old friend of his, one of the oldest established notaries of Paris. Without this letter it is not possible to understand Chesnel's real and assumed fatherhood. It almost recalls Dædalus' address to Icarus; for where, save in old mythology, can you look for comparisons worthy of this man of antique mould?

"MY DEAR AND ESTIMABLE SORBIER:—I remember with no little pleasure that I made my first campaign in our honorable profession under your father, and that you had a liking for me, poor little clerk that I was. And now I appeal to old memories of the days when we worked in the same office, old pleasant memories for our hearts, to ask you to do me the one service that I have ever asked of you in the course of our long lives, crossed as they have been by political catastrophes, to which, perhaps, I owe it that I have the honor to be your colleague. And now I ask this service of you, my friend, and my white hairs will be brought with sorrow to the grave if you should refuse my entreaty. It is no question of myself or of mine, Sorbier, for I lost poor Mme. Chesnel, and I have no child of my own. Something more to me than my own family (if I had had one) is involved—it is the Marquis d'Esgrignon's only son. I have had the honor to be the marquis' land-steward ever since I left the office to which his

father sent me at his own expense, with the idea of providing for me. The house which nurtured me has passed through all the troubles of the Revolution. I have managed to save some of their property ; but what is it, after all, in comparison with the wealth that they have lost ? I cannot tell you, Sorbier, how deeply I am attached to the great house, which has been all but swallowed up under my eyes by the abyss of time. M. le Marquis was proscribed, and his lands confiscated, he was getting on in *yéars*, he had no child. Misfortunes upon misfortunes ! Then M. le Marquis married, and his wife died when the young count was born, and to-day this noble, dear, and precious child is all the life of the d'Esgriignon family ; the fate of the house hangs upon him. He has got into debt here with amusing himself. What else should he do in the provinces with an allowance of a miserable hundred louis ? Yes, my friend, a hundred louis, the great house had come to this.

“In this extremity his father thinks it necessary to send the count to Paris to ask for the King’s favor at Court. Paris is a very dangerous place for a lad ; if he is to keep steady there he must have the grain of sense which makes notaries of us. Beside, I should be heart-broken to think of the poor boy living amid such hardships as we have known. Do you remember the pleasure with which you shared my roll in the pit of the *Théâtre-Français* when we spent a day and a night there waiting to see ‘*The Marriage of Figaro* ?’ Oh, blind that we were ! We were happy and poor, but a noble cannot be happy in poverty. A noble in want—it is a thing against nature ! Ah ! Sorbier, when one has known the satisfaction of propping one of the grandest genealogical trees in the kingdom in its fall, it is so natural to interest one’s self in it and to grow fond of it, and love it and water it and look to see it blossom. So you will not be surprised at so many precautions on my part ; you will not wonder when I beg the help of your lights, so that all may go well with our young man.

“The family has allowed a hundred thousand francs for the expenses of M. le Comte’s journey. There is not a young man in Paris fit to compare with him, as you will see! You will take an interest in him as if he were your only son; and, lastly, I am quite sure that Mme. Sorbier will not hesitate to second you in the office of guardian. M. le Comte Victurnien’s monthly allowance is fixed at two thousand francs, but give him ten thousand for his preliminary expenses. The family has provided in this way for a stay of two years, unless he takes a journey abroad, in which case we will see about making other arrangements. Join me in this work, my old friend, and keep the purse-strings fairly tight. Represent things to M. le Comte without reproving him; hold him in as far as you can, and do not let him anticipate his monthly allowance without sufficient reason, for he must not be driven to desperation if honor is involved.

“Keep yourself informed of his movements and doings, of the company which he keeps, and watch over his connections with women. M. le Chevalier says that an opera-dancer often costs less than a court lady. Obtain information on that point and let me know. If you are too busy, perhaps Mme. Sorbier might know what becomes of the young man, and where he goes. The idea of playing the part of guardian angel to such a noble and charming boy might have attractions for her. God will remember her for accepting the sacred trust. Perhaps when you see M. le Comte Victurnien, her heart may tremble at the thought of all the dangers awaiting him in Paris; he is very young and very handsome, clever, and at the same time disposed to trust others. If he forms a connection with some designing woman, Mme. Sorbier could counsel him better than you yourself could do. The old manservant who is with him can tell you many things; sound Joséphin, I have told him to go to you in delicate matters.

“But why should I say more? We once were clerks together, and a pair of scamps; remember our escapades, and

be a little bit young again, my old friend, in your dealings with him. The sixty thousand francs will be remitted to you in the shape of a bill on the Treasury by a gentleman who is going to Paris," and so forth.

If the old couple to whom this epistle was addressed had followed out Chesnel's instructions, they would have been compelled to take three private detectives into their pay. And yet there was ample wisdom shown in Chesnel's choice of a depository. A banker pays money to any one accredited to him so long as the money lasts; whereas, Victurnien was obliged, every time that he was in want of money, to make a personal visit to the notary, who was quite sure to use the right of remonstrance.

Victurnien heard that he was to be allowed two thousand francs every month, and thought that he betrayed his joy. He knew nothing of Paris. He fancied that he could keep up princely state on such a sum.

Next day he started on his journey. The sudden departure supplied material for conversation for several evenings; and what was more, it stirred the rancorous minds of the salon du Croisier to the depths. The forage-contractor, the president, and others who had vowed to ruin the d'Esgrignons, saw their prey escaping out of their hands. They had based their schemes of revenge on a young man's follies, and now he was beyond their reach.

The tendency in human nature, which often gives a bigot a rake for a daughter, and makes a frivolous woman the mother of a narrow pietist; that rule of contraries, which, in all probability, is the "resultant" of the law of similarities, drew Victurnien to Paris by a desire to which he must sooner or later have yielded. Brought up as he had been in the old-fashioned provincial house, among the quiet, gentle faces that smiled upon him, among sober servants attached to the family, and surroundings tinged with a general color of age, the boy

had only seen friends worthy of respect. All of those about him, with the exception of the chevalier, that example of venerable age, were elderly men and women, sedate of manner, decorous and sententious of speech. He had been petted by those women in the gray gowns and embroidered mittens described by Blondet. The antiquated splendors of his father's house were as little calculated as possible to suggest frivolous thoughts; and, lastly, he had been educated by a sincerely religious abbé, possessed of all the charm of an old age, which has dwelt in two centuries, and brings to the Present its gifts of the dried roses of experience, the faded flowers of the old customs of its youth.

For him, his noble birth was a stepping-stone which raised him above other men. He felt that the idol of Noblesse, before which they burned incense at home, was hollow; he had come to be one of the commonest as well as one of the worst types from a social point of view—a consistent egoist. The aristocratic cult of the *Ego* simply taught him to follow his own fancies; he had been idolized by those who had the care of him in childhood, and adored by the companions who shared in his boyish escapades, and so he had formed a habit of looking and judging everything as it affected his own pleasure; he took it as a matter of course when good souls saved him from the consequences of his follies, a piece of mistaken kindness which could only lead to his ruin.

Victurnien was quick-sighted, he saw clearly and without illusion, but he acted on impulse, and unwisely. An indefinable flaw of character, often seen in young men, but impossible to explain, led him to will one thing and do another. In spite of an active mind, which showed itself in unexpected ways, the senses had but to assert themselves, and the darkened brain seemed to exist no longer. He might have astonished wise men; he was capable of setting fools agape. His desires, like a sudden squall of bad weather, overclouded all the clear and lucid spaces of his brain in a moment; and then, after

the dissipations which he could not resist, he sank, utterly exhausted in body, heart, and mind, into a collapsed condition bordering upon imbecility. Such a character will drag a man down into the mire if he is left to himself, or bring him to the highest heights of political power if he has some stern friend to keep him in hand. Neither Chesnel, nor the lad's father, nor Aunt Armande had fathomed the depths of a nature so nearly akin on many sides to the poetic temperament, yet smitten with a terrible weakness at its core.

By the time the old town lay several miles away, Victurnien felt not the slightest regret; he thought no more about the father, who had loved ten generations in his son; nor of the aunt, and her almost insane devotion. He was looking forward to Paris with vehement ill-starred longings, in thought he had lived in that fairyland, it had been the background of his brightest dreams. He imagined that he would be first in Paris, as he had been in the town and the department where his father's name was potent; but it was vanity, not pride, that filled his soul, and in his dreams his pleasures were to be magnified by all the greatness of Paris; he hastened to take possession of it as a famished horse rushes into a meadow.

He was not long in finding out the difference between country and town, and was rather surprised than abashed by the change. His mental quickness soon discovered how small an entity he was in the midst of this all-comprehending Babylon; how insane it would be to attempt to stem the torrent of new ideas and new ways. A single incident was enough. He delivered his father's letter of introduction to the Duc de Lenoncourt, a noble who stood high in favor with the King. He saw the duke in his splendid mansion, among surroundings befitting his rank. Next day he met him again. This time the Peer of France was lounging on foot along the boulevard, just like any ordinary mortal, with an umbrella in his hand; he did not even wear the Blue Ribbon, without

which no knight of the order could have appeared in public in other times. And, duke and peer and first gentleman of the bedchamber though he was, M. de Lenoncourt, spite of his high courtesy, could not repress a smile as he read his relative's letter; and that smile told Victurnien that the Collection of Antiquities and the Tuileries were separated by more than sixty leagues of road—the distance of several centuries lay between them.

The names of the families grouped about the throne are quite different in each successive reign, and the characters change with the names. It would seem that, in the sphere of Court, the same thing happens over and over again in each generation; but each time there is a quite different set of personages. If history did not prove that this is so, it would seem incredible. The prominent men at the Court of Louis XVIII., for instance, had scarcely any connection with the Rivières, Blacas, d'Avarays, Vitrolles, d'Autichamps, Pasquiers, Larochejaqueleins, Decazes, Dambrays, Lainés, de Villèles, La Bourdonnays, and others who shone at the Court of Louis XV. Compare the courtiers of Henri IV. with those of Louis XIV.; you will hardly find five great families of the former time still in existence. The nephew of the great Richelieu was a very insignificant person at the Court of Louis XIV.; while his majesty's favorite, Villeroy, was the grandson of a secretary ennobled by Charles IX. And so it befell that the d'Esgrignons, all but princes under the Valois, and all-powerful in the time of Henri IV., had no fortune whatever at the Court of Louis XVIII., which gave them not so much as a thought. At this day there are names as famous as those of royal houses—the Foix-Graillys, for instance, or the d'Hérouvilles—left to obscurity tantamount to extinction for want of money, the one power of the time.

All which things Victurnien beheld entirely from his own point of view; he felt the equality that he saw in Paris as a personal wrong. The monster Equality was swallowing down

the last fragments of social distinction in the Restoration. Having made up his mind on this head, he immediately proceeded to try to win back his place with such dangerous, if blunted, weapons as the age left to the noblesse. It is an expensive matter to gain the attention of Paris. To this end, Victurnien adopted some of the ways then in vogue. He felt that it was a necessity to have horses and fine carriages, and all the accessories of modern luxury; he felt, in short, "that a man must keep abreast of the times," as de Marsay said—de Marsay, the first dandy that he came across in the first drawing-room to which he was introduced. For his misfortune, he fell in with a set of roués, with de Marsay, de Ronquerolles, Maxime de Trailles, des Lupeaulx, Rastignac, Ajuda-Pinto, Beaudenord, de la Roche-Hugon, de Manerville, and the Vandenesses, whom he met wherever he went, and a great many houses were open to a young man with his ancient name and reputation for wealth. He went to the Marquise d'Espard's, to the Duchesses de Grandlieu, de Carigliano, and de Chaulieu, to the Marquises d'Aiglemont and de Listomère, to Mme. de Sérizy's, to the opera, to the embassies and elsewhere. The Faubourg Saint-Germain has its provincial genealogies at its fingers' ends; a great name once recognized and adopted therein is a passport which opens many a door that will scarcely turn on its hinges for unknown names or the lions of a lower rank.

Victurnien found his relatives both amiable and ready to welcome him so long as he did not appear as a suppliant; he saw at once that the surest way of obtaining nothing was to ask for something. At Paris, if the first impulse moves people to protect, second thoughts (which last a good deal longer) impel them to despise the protegé. Independence, vanity, and pride, all the young count's better and worse feelings combined, led him, on the contrary, to assume an aggressive attitude. And therefore the Ducs de Verneuil, de Lenoncourt, de Chaulieu, de Navarreins, d'Hérouville, de Grandlieu, and

de Maufrigneuse, the Princes de Cadignan and de Blamont-Chauvry, were delighted to present the charming survivor of the wreck of an ancient family at Court.

Victurnien went to the Tuileries in a splendid carriage with his armorial bearings on the panels; but his presentation to his majesty made it abundantly clear to him that the people occupied the royal mind so much that his nobility was like to be forgotten. The restored dynasty, moreover, was surrounded by triple ranks of eligible old men and gray-headed courtiers; the young noblesse was reduced to a cipher, and this Victurnien guessed at once. He saw that there was no suitable place for him at Court, nor in the government, nor the army, nor, indeed, anywhere else. So he launched out into the world of pleasure. Introduced at the Élysée-Bourbon, at the Duchesse d'Angoulême's, at the Pavillon Marsan, he met on all sides with the surface civilities due to the heir of an old family, not so old but it could be called to mind by the sight of a living member. And, after all, it was not a small thing to be remembered. In the distinction with which Victurnien was honored lay the way to the peerage and a splendid marriage; he had taken the field with a false appearance of wealth, and his vanity would not allow him to declare his real position. Beside, he had been so much complimented on the figure that he made, he was so pleased with his first success, that, like many other young men, he felt ashamed to draw back. He took a suite of rooms in the Rue du Bac, with stables and a complete equipment for the fashionable life to which he had committed himself. These preliminaries cost him fifty thousand francs, which money, moreover, the young gentleman managed to draw in spite of all Chesnel's wise precautions, thanks to a series of unforeseen events.

Chesnel's letter certainly reached his friend's office, but Maître Sorbier was dead; and Mme. Sorbier, a matter-of-fact person, seeing that it was a business letter, handed it on to her husband's successor. Maître Cardot, the new notary, informed

the young count that a draft on the Treasury made payable to the deceased would be useless ; and by way of reply to the letter, which had cost the old provincial notary so much thought, Cardot dispatched four lines intended not to reach Chesnel's heart, but to produce the money. Chesnel made the draft payable to Sorbier's young successor ; and the latter, feeling but little inclination to adopt his correspondent's sentimentality, was delighted to put himself at the count's orders, and gave Victurnien as much money as he wanted.

Now those who know what life in Paris means, know that fifty thousand francs will not go very far in furniture, horses, carriages, and elegance generally ; but it must be borne in mind that Victurnien immediately contracted some twenty thousand francs' worth of debts beside, and his tradespeople at first were not at all anxious to be paid, for our young gentleman's fortune had been prodigiously increased, partly by rumor, partly by Joséphin, that Chesnel in livery.

Victurnien had not been in town a month before he was obliged to repair to his man of business for ten thousand francs ; he had only been playing whist with the Ducs de Navarreins, de Chaulieu, and de Lenoncourt, and now and again at his club. He had begun by winning some thousands of francs, but pretty soon lost five or six thousand, which brought home to him the necessity of a purse for play. A man ought to renew his wealth perpetually, and as Nature does—below the surface and out of sight. People talk if somebody comes to grief ; they joke about a new-comer's fortune till their minds are set at rest, and at this they draw the line. Victurnien d'Esgrignon, with all the Faubourg Saint-Germain to back him, with all his protectors exaggerating the amount of his fortune (were it only to rid themselves of responsibility), and magnifying his possessions in the most refined and well-bred way, with a hint or a word ; with all these advantages—to repeat—Victurnien was, in fact, an eligible count. He was handsome, witty, sound in politics ; his

father still possessed the ancestral castle and the lands of the marquisate. Such a young fellow is sure of an admirable reception in houses where there are marriageable daughters, fair but portionless partners at dances, and young married women who find that time hangs heavy on their hands. So the world, smiling, beckoned him to the foremost benches in its booth ; the seats reserved for marquises are still in the same place in Paris ; and if the names are changed, the things are the same as ever.

In the most exclusive circle of society in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, Victurnien found the chevalier's double in the person of the Vidame de Pamiers. The vidame was a Chevalier de Valois raised to the tenth power, invested with all the prestige of wealth, enjoying all the advantages of high position. The dear vidame was a repository for everybody's secrets, and the gazette of the Faubourg beside ; nevertheless, he was discreet, and, like other gazettes, only said things that might safely be published. Again Victurnien listened to the chevalier's esoteric doctrines. The vidame told young d'Esgrignon, without mincing matters, to make conquests among women of quality, supplementing the advice with anecdotes from his own experience. The Vicomte de Pamiers, it seemed, had permitted himself much that it would serve no purpose to relate here ; so remote was it from all our modern manners, in which soul and passion play so large a part, that nobody would believe it. But the excellent vidame did more than this.

"Dine with me at a café to-morrow," said he, by way of conclusion. "We will digest our dinner at the opera, and afterward I will take you to a house where several people have the greatest wish to meet you."

The vidame gave a delightful little dinner at the Rocher de Cancale ; three guests only were asked to meet Victurnien—de Marsay, Rastignac, and Blondet. Émile Blondet, the young count's fellow-townsmen, was a man of letters on the

outskirts of society to which he had been introduced by a charming woman from the same province. This was one of the Vicomte de Troisville's daughters, now married to the Comte de Montcornet, one of those of Napoleon's generals who went over to the Bourbons. The vidame held that a dinner-party of more than six persons was beneath contempt. In that case, according to him, there was an end alike of cookery and conversation, and a man could not sip his wine in a proper frame of mind.

"I have not yet told you, my dear boy, where I mean to take you to-night," he said, taking Victurnien's hands, and tapping on them. "You are going to see Mademoiselle des Touches; all the pretty women with any pretensions to wit will be at her house *en petit comité*.* Literature, art, poetry, any sort of genius, in short, is held in great esteem there. It is one of our old-world *bureaux d'esprit*, with a veneer of monarchical doctrine, the livery of this present age."

"It is sometimes as tiresome and tedious there as a pair of new boots, but there are women with whom you cannot meet anywhere else," said de Marsay.

"If all the poets who went there to rub up their muse were like our friend here," said Rastignac, tapping Blondet familiarly on the shoulder, "we should have some fun. But a plague of odes, and ballads, and driveling meditations, and novels with wide margins, pervades the sofas and the atmosphere."

"I don't dislike them," said de Marsay, "so long as they corrupt girls' minds and don't spoil women."

"Gentlemen," smiled Blondet, "you are encroaching on my field of literature."

"You need not talk. You have robbed us of the most charming woman in the world, you lucky rogue; we may be allowed to steal your less brilliant ideas," cried Rastignac.

"Yes, he is a lucky rascal," said the vidame, and he

* Having a little meeting.

twitched Blondet's ear. "But perhaps Victurnien here will be luckier still this evening——"

"*Already!*" exclaimed de Marsay. "Why, he only came here a month ago; he has scarcely had time to shake the dust of his old manor-house off his feet, to wipe off the brine in which his aunt kept him preserved; he has only just set up a decent horse, a tilbury in the latest style, a groom——"

"No, no, not a groom," interrupted Rastignac; "he has some sort of an agricultural laborer that he brought with him 'from his place.' Buisson, who understands a livery as well as most, declared that the man was physically incapable of wearing a jacket."

"I will tell you what, you ought to have modeled yourself on Beaudenord," the vidame said seriously. "He has this advantage over all of you, my young friends, he has a genuine specimen of the English tiger——"

"Just see, gentlemen, what the noblesse have come to in France!" cried Victurnien. "For them the one important thing is to have a tiger, a thoroughbred, and baubles——"

"Bless me!" said Blondet. "'This gentleman's good sense at times appalls me.' Well, yes, young moralist, you nobles have come to that. You have not even left to you that lustre of lavish expenditure for which the dear vidame was famous fifty years ago. We revel on a second floor in the Rue Montorgueil. There are no more wars with the cardinal, no Field of the Cloth of Gold. You, Comte d'Esgrignon, in short, are supping in the company of one Blondet, younger son of a miserable provincial magistrate, with whom you would not shake hands down yonder; and in ten years' time you may sit beside him among peers of the realm. Believe in yourself after that, if you can."

"Ah, well," said Rastignac, "we have passed from action to thought, from brute force to force of intellect—we are talking——"

"Let us not talk of our reverses," protested the vidame;

"I have made up my mind to die merrily. If our friend here has not a tiger as yet, he comes of a race of lions, and can dispense with one."

"He cannot do without a tiger," said Blondet; "he is too newly come to town."

"His elegance may be new as yet," returned de Marsay, "but we are adopting it. He is worthy of us, he understands his age, he has brains, he is nobly born and gently bred; we are going to like him, and serve him, and push him——"

"Whither?" inquired Blondet.

"Inquisitive soul!" said Rastignac.

"With whom will he take up to-night?" de Marsay asked.

"With a whole seraglio," said the vidame.

"Plague take it! What can we have done that the dear vidame is punishing us by keeping his word to the infant? I should be pitiable indeed if I did not know her——"

"And I was once a coxcomb even as he," said the vidame, indicating de Marsay.

The conversation continued pitched in the same key, charmingly scandalous and agreeably corrupt. The dinner went off very pleasantly. Rastignac and de Marsay went to the opera with the vidame and Victurnien, with a view to following them afterward to Mlle. des Touches' salon. And thither, accordingly, this pair of rakes betook themselves, calculating that by that time the tragedy would have been read; for of all things to be taken between eleven and twelve o'clock at night, a tragedy in their opinion was the most unwholesome. They went to keep a watch on Victurnien and to embarrass him, a piece of schoolboy's mischief embittered by a jealous dandy's spite. But Victurnien was gifted with that page's effrontery which is a great help to ease of manner; and Rastignac, watching him as he made his entrance, was surprised to see how quickly he caught the tone of the moment.

"That young d'Esgrignon will go far, will he not?" he said, addressing his companion.

“That is as may be,” returned de Marsay, “but he is in a fair way.”

The vidame introduced his young friend to one of the most amiable and frivolous duchesses of the day, a lady whose adventures caused an explosion five years later. Just then, however, she was in the full blaze of her glory; she had been suspected, it is true, of equivocal conduct; but suspicion, while it is still suspicion and not proof, marks a woman out with the kind of distinction which slander gives to a man. Nonentities are never slandered; they chafe because they are left in peace. This woman was, in fact, the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, a daughter of the d’Uxelles; her father-in-law was still alive; she was not to be the Princesse de Cadignan for some years to come. A friend of the Duchesse de Langeais and the Vicomtesse de Beauséant, two glories departed, she was likewise intimate with the Marquise d’Espard, with whom she disputed her fragile sovereignty as queen of fashion. Great relations lent her countenance for a long while, but the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse was one of those women who, in some way, nobody knows how, or why, or where, will spend the rents of all the lands of earth, and of the moon likewise, if they were not out of reach. The general outline of her character was scarcely known as yet; de Marsay, and de Marsay only, really had read her. That redoubtable dandy now watched the Vidame de Pamier’s introduction of his young friend to that lovely woman, and bent over to say in Rastignac’s ear—

“My dear fellow, he will go up *whizz!* like a rocket, and come down like a stick,” an atrociously vulgar saying which was remarkably fulfilled.

The Duchesse de Maufrigneuse had lost her heart to Victurnien after first giving her mind to a serious study of him. Any lover who should have caught the glance by which she expressed her gratitude to the vidame might well have been

jealous of such friendship. Women are like horses let loose on a prairie when they feel, as the duchess felt with the *Vidame de Pamiers*, that the ground is safe; at such moments they are themselves; perhaps it pleases them to give, as it were, samples of their tenderness in intimacy in this way. It was a guarded glance, nothing was lost between eye and eye; there was no possibility of reflection in any mirror. Nobody intercepted it.

"See how she has prepared herself," *Rastignac* said, turning to *de Marsay*. "What a virginal toilette; what swan's grace in that snow-white throat of hers! How white her gown is, and she is wearing a sash like a little girl; she looks round like a *madonna* inviolate. Who would think that you had passed that way?"

"The very reason why she looks as she does," returned *de Marsay*, with a triumphant air.

The two young men exchanged a smile. *Mme. de Maufrigneuse* saw the smile and guessed at their conversation, and gave the pair a broadside of her eyes, an art acquired by Frenchwomen since the Peace, when Englishwomen imported it into this country, together with the shape of their silver, their horses and harness, and the piles of insular ice which impart a refreshing coolness to the atmosphere of any room in which a certain number of British females are gathered together. The young men grew serious as a couple of clerks at the end of a homily from headquarters before the receipt of an unexpected bonus.

The duchess, when she lost her heart to *Victurnien*, had made up her mind to play the part of romantic Innocence, a role much understudied subsequently by other women, for the misfortune of modern youth. Her grace of *Maufrigneuse* had just come out as an angel at a moment's notice, precisely as she meant to turn to literature and science somewhere about her fortieth year instead of taking to devotion. She made a point of being like nobody else. Her parts, her dresses, her

caps, opinions, toilettes, and manner of acting were all entirely new and original. Soon after her marriage, when she was scarcely more than a girl, she had played the part of a knowing and almost depraved woman ; she ventured on risky repartees with shallow people, and betrayed her ignorance to those who knew better. As the date of that marriage made it impossible to abstract one little year from her age without the knowledge of Time, and as her grace had reached her twenty-sixth year, she had taken it into her head to be immaculate. She scarcely seemed to belong to earth ; she shook out her wide sleeves as if they had been wings. Her eyes fled to heaven at too warm a glance, or word, or thought.

There is a madonna painted by Piola, the great Genoese painter, who bade fair to bring out a second edition of Raphael till his career was cut short by jealousy and murder ; his madonna, however, you may dimly discern through a pane of glass in a little street in Genoa.

A more chaste-eyed madonna than Piola's does not exist ; but, compared with Mme. de Maufrigneuse, that heavenly creature was a Messalina. Women wondered among themselves how such a giddy young thing had been transformed by a change of dress into the fair-veiled seraph who seemed (to use an expression now in vogue) to have a soul as white as new-fallen snow on the highest Alpine crests ? How had she solved in such short space the jesuitical problem how to display a bosom whiter than her soul by hiding it in gauze ? How could she look so ethereal while her eyes drooped so murderously ? Those almost wanton glances seemed to give promise of untold languorous delight, while by an ascetic's sigh of aspiration after a better life the mouth appeared to add that none of those promises would be fulfilled. Ingenuous youths (for there were a few to be found in the Guards of that day) privately wondered whether, in the most intimate moments, it were possible to speak familiarly to this White Lady, this starry vapor slidden down from the Milky Way. This

system, which answered completely for some years at a stretch, was turned to good account by women of fashion, whose breasts were lined with a stout philosophy, for they could cloak no inconsiderable exactions with these little airs from the sacristy. Not one of the celestial creatures but was quite well aware of the possibilities of less ethereal love which lay in the longing of every well-conditioned male to recall such beings to earth. It was a fashion which permitted them to abide in a semi-religious, semi-Ossianic empyrean ; they could, and did, ignore all the practical details of daily life, a short and easy method of disposing of many questions. De Marsay, foreseeing the future developments of the system, added a last word, for he saw that Rastignac was jealous of Victurnien.

"My boy," said he, "stay as you are. Our Nucingen will make your fortune, whereas the duchess would ruin you. She is too expensive."

Rastignac allowed de Marsay to go without asking further questions. He knew Paris. He knew that the most refined and noble and disinterested of women—a woman who cannot be induced to accept anything but a bouquet—can be as dangerous an acquaintance for a young man as any opera girl of former days. As a matter of fact, the opera girl is an almost mythical being. As things are now at the theatres, dancers and actresses are about as amusing as a declaration of the rights of woman, they are puppets that go abroad in the morning in the character of respected and respectable mothers of families, and act men's parts in tight-fitting garments at night.

Worthy M. Chesnel, in his country notary's office, was right ; he had foreseen one of the reefs on which the count might make shipwreck. Victurnien was dazzled by the poetic aureola which Mme. de Maufrigneuse chose to assume ; he was chained and padlocked from the first hour in her company, bound captive by that girlish sash, and caught by the curls twined round fairy fingers. Far corrupted the boy was

already, but he really believed in that farrago of maidenliness and muslin, in sweet looks as much studied as an Act of Parliament. And if the one man, who is in duty bound to believe in feminine fibs, is deceived by them, is not that enough?

The converse which Victurnien held with the duchess can be kept up at his age without too great a strain. He was young enough and ignorant enough of life in Paris to feel no necessity to be upon his guard, no need to keep a watch over his lightest words and glances. The religious sentimentalism, which finds a broadly humorous commentary in the after-thoughts of either speaker, puts the old-world French chat of men and women, with its pleasant familiarity, its lively ease, quite out of the question; they make love in a mist nowadays.

Victurnien was just sufficient of an unsophisticated provincial to remain suspended in a highly appropriate and unfeigned rapture which pleased the duchess; for women are no more to be deceived by the comedies which men play than by their own. Mme. de Maufrigneuse calculated, not without dismay, that the young count's infatuation was likely to hold good for six whole months of disinterested love. She looked so lovely in this dove's mood, quenching the light in her eyes by the golden fringe of their lashes, that when the Marquise d'Espard bade her friend good-night, she whispered: "Good! very good, dear!" And with these farewell words, the fair marquise left her rival to make the tour of the modern *pays du Tendre*; which, by the way, is not so absurd a conception as some appear to think. New maps of the country are engraved for each generation; and if the names of the routes are different, they still lead to the same capital city.

In the course of an hour's *tête-à-tête*, on a corner sofa, under the eyes of the world, the duchess brought young d'Esgrignon as far as Scipio's Generosity, the Devotion of Amadis, and Chivalrous Self-abnegation (for the Middle Ages were just coming into fashion, with their daggers, machicolations, hau-

berks, chain-mail, peaked shoes, and romantic, painted cardboard properties). She had an admirable turn, moreover, for leaving things unsaid, for leaving ideas in a discreet, seemingly careless way, to work their way down, one by one, into Victurnien's heart, like needles into a cushion. She possessed a marvelous skill in reticence; she was charming in hypocrisy, lavish of subtle promises, which revived hope and then melted away like ice in the sun if you looked at them closely, and most treacherous in the desire which she felt and inspired. At the close of this charming encounter she produced the running noose of an invitation to call, and flung it over him with a dainty demureness which the printed page can never set forth.

"You will forget me," she said. "You will find so many women eager to pay court to you instead of enlightening you—— But you will come back to me undeceived. Are you coming to me first?—— No. As you will. For my own part, I tell you frankly that your visits will be a great pleasure to me. People of soul are so rare, and I think that you are one of them. Come, farewell; people will begin to talk about us if we talk together any longer."

She made good her words and took flight. Victurnien went soon afterward, but not before others had guessed his ecstatic condition; his face wore the expression peculiar to happy men, something between an Inquisitor's calm discretion and the self-contained beatitude of a devotee, fresh from the confessional and absolution.

"Madame de Maufrigneuse went pretty briskly to the point this evening," said the Duchesse de Grandlieu, when only half-a-dozen persons were left in Mlle. des Touches' little drawing-room—to wit, des Lupeaulx, a master of requests, who at that time stood very well at Court, Vandenesse, the Vicomtesse de Grandlieu, Monsieur Canalis, and Madame de Sérizy.

"D'Esgrignon and Maufrigneuse are two names that are

sure to cling together," said Mme. de Sérizy, who aspired to epigram.

"For some days past she has been out at grass on Platonism," said des Lupeaulx.

"She will ruin that poor innocent," added Charles de Vandenesse.

"What do you mean?" asked Mlle. des Touches.

"Oh, morally and financially, beyond all doubt," said the vicomtesse, rising.

The cruel words were cruelly true for young d'Esgrignon.

Next morning he wrote to his aunt describing his introduction into the high world of the Faubourg Saint-Germain in bright colors flung by the prism of love, explaining the reception which met him everywhere in a way which gratified his father's family pride. The marquis would have the whole long letter read to him twice; he rubbed his hands when he heard of the Vidame des Pamiers' dinner—the vidame was an old acquaintance—and of the subsequent introduction to the duchess; but at Blondet's name he lost himself in conjectures. What could the younger son of a judge, a public prosecutor during the Revolution, have been doing there?

There was joy that evening among the Collection of Antiquities. They talked over the young count's success. So discreet were they with regard to Mme. de Maufrigneuse, that the one man who heard the secret was the chevalier. There was no financial postscript at the end of the letter, no unpleasant concluding reference to the sinews of war, which every young man makes in such a case. Mlle. Armande showed it to Chesnel. Chesnel was pleased and raised not a single objection. It was clear, as the marquis and the chevalier agreed, that a young man in favor with the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse would shortly be a hero at Court, where in the old days women were all-powerful. The count had not made a bad choice. The dowagers told over all the gallant adventures of the Maufrigneuses from Louis XIII. to Louis XVI.—

they spared to inquire into preceding reigns—and when all was done they were enchanted. Mme. de Maufrigneuse was much praised for interesting herself in Victurnien. Any writer of plays in search of a piece of pure comedy would have found it well worth his while to listen to the Antiquities in conclave.

Victurnien received charming letters from his father and aunt, and also from the chevalier. That gentleman recalled himself to the vidame's memory. He had been at Spa with M. de Pamiers in 1778, after a certain journey made by a celebrated Hungarian princess. And Chesnel also wrote. The fond flattery to which the unhappy boy was only too well accustomed shone out of every page; and Mlle. Armande seemed to share half of Mme. de Maufrigneuse's happiness.

Thus happy in the approval of his family, the young count made a spirited beginning in the perilous and costly ways of dandyism. He had five horses—he was moderate—de Marsay had fourteen! He returned the vidame's hospitality, even including Blondet in the invitation, as well as de Marsay and Rastignac. The dinner cost five hundred francs, and the noble provincial was fêted on the same scale. Victurnien played a good deal, and, for his misfortune, at the fashionable game of whist.

He laid out his days in busy idleness. Every day between twelve and three o'clock he was with the duchess; afterward he went to meet her in the Bois de Boulogne and ride beside her carriage. Sometimes the charming couple rode together, but this was early on fine summer mornings. Society, balls, the theatre, and gayety filled the count's evening hours. Everywhere Victurnien made a brilliant figure; everywhere he flung the pearls of his wit broadcast.

The duchess, so white and fragile and angel-like, felt attracted to the dissipations of bachelor life; she enjoyed first nights; she liked anything amusing, anything improvised.

Bohemian restaurants lay outside her experience ; so d'Esgrignon got up a charming little party at the Rocher de Cancale for her benefit, asked all the amiable scamps whom she cultivated and sermonized, and there was a vast amount of merriment, wit, and gayety, and a corresponding bill to pay. That supper party led to others. And through it all Victurnien worshiped her as an angel. Mme. de Maufrigneuse for him was still an angel, untouched by any taint of earth ; an angel at the Variétés, where she sat out the half-obscene, vulgar farces, which made her laugh ; an angel through the cross-fire of highly flavored jests and scandalous anecdotes, which enlivened a stolen frolic ; a languishing angel in the latticed box at the Vaudeville ; an angel while she criticised the postures of opera-dancers with the experience of an elderly habitué of *le coin de la reine* ; an angel at the Porte Saint-Martin, at the little boulevard theatres, at the masked balls, which she enjoyed like any schoolboy. She was an angel who asked him for the love that lives by self-abnegation and heroism and self-sacrifice ; an angel who would have her lover live like an English lord, with an income of a million francs. D'Esgrignon once exchanged a horse because the animal's coat did not satisfy her notions. At play she was an angel, and certainly no bourgeoisie that ever lived could have bidden d'Esgrignon "Stake for me !" in such an angelic way. She was so divinely reckless in her folly that a man might well have sold his soul to the devil lest this angel should lose her taste for earthly pleasures.

The first winter went by. The count had drawn on M. Cardot for the trifling sum of thirty thousand francs over and above Chesnel's remittance. As Cardot very carefully refrained from using his right of remonstrance, Victurnien now learned for the first time that he had overdrawn his account. He was the more offended by an extremely polite refusal to make any further advance, since it so happened that he had

just lost six thousand francs at play at the club, and he could not very well show himself there until they were paid.

After growing indignant with Maître Cardot, who had trusted him with thirty thousand francs (Cardot had written to Chesnel, but to the fair duchess' favorite he made the most of his so-called confidence in him), after all this, d'Esgrignon was obliged to ask the lawyer to tell him how to set about raising the money, since debts of honor were in question.

"Draw bills on your father's banker, and take them to his correspondent; he, no doubt, will discount them for you. Then write to your family, and tell them to remit the amount to the banker."

An inner voice seemed to suggest du Croisier's name in this predicament. He had seen du Croisier on his knees to the aristocracy, and of the man's real disposition he was entirely ignorant. So to du Croisier he wrote a very off-hand letter, informing him that he had drawn a bill of exchange on him for ten thousand francs, adding that the amount would be repaid on receipt of the letter either by M. Chesnel or by Mlle. Armande d'Esgrignon. Then he indited two touching epistles—one to Chesnel, another to his aunt. In the matter of going headlong to ruin, a young man often shows singular ingenuity and ability, and fortune favors him. In the morning Victurnien happened on the name of the Paris bankers in correspondence with du Croisier, and de Marsay furnished him with the Kellers' address. De Marsay knew everything in Paris. The Kellers took the bill and gave him the sum without a word, after deducting the discount. The balance of the account was in du Croisier's favor.

But the gaming debt was as nothing in comparison with the state of things at home. Invoices and accounts showered in upon Victurnien.

"I say! Do you trouble yourself about that sort of thing?" Rastignac said, laughing. "Are you putting them in order, my dear boy? I did not think you were so business-like."

"My dear fellow, it is quite time I thought about it ; there are twenty-odd thousand francs there."

De Marsay, coming in to look up d'Esgrignon for a steeple-chase, produced a dainty little pocket-book, took out twenty thousand francs, and handed them to him.

"It is the best way of keeping the money safe," said he ; "I am twice enchanted to have won it yesterday from my honored father, Milord Dudley."

Such French grace completely fascinated d'Esgrignon ; he took it for friendship ; and as to the money, punctually forgot to pay his debts with it, and spent it on his pleasures. The fact was that de Marsay was looking on with an unspeakable pleasure while young d'Esgrignon "got out of his depth," in dandy's idiom ; it pleased de Marsay in all sorts of fondling ways to lay an arm on the lad's shoulder ; by-and-by he should feel its weight, and disappear the sooner. For de Marsay was jealous ; the duchess flaunted her love affair ; she was not at home to other visitors when d'Esgrignon was with her. And beside, de Marsay was one of those savage humorists who delight in mischief, as Turkish women in the bath. So, when he had carried off the prize, and bets were settled at the tavern where they breakfasted, and a bottle or two of good wine had appeared, de Marsay turned to d'Esgrignon with a laugh—

"Those bills that you are worrying over are not yours, I am sure."

"Eh ! if they weren't, why should he worry himself?" asked Rastignac.

"And whose should they be?" d'Esgrignon inquired.

"Then you do not know the duchess' position?" queried de Marsay, as he sprang into the saddle.

"No," said d'Esgrignon, his curiosity aroused.

"Well, dear fellow, it is like this," returned de Marsay—"thirty thousand francs to Victorine, eighteen thousand francs to Houbigaut, lesser amounts to Herbault, Nattier, Nourtier,

and those Latour people—together a hundred thousand francs."

"An angel!" cried d'Esgrignon, with eyes uplifted to heaven.

"This is the *bill* for her *wings*," Rastignac cried facetiously.

"She owes all that, my dear boy," continued de Marsay, "precisely because she is an angel. But we have all seen angels in this position," he added, glancing at Rastignac; "there is this about women that is sublime, they understand nothing of money; they do not meddle with it, it is no affair of theirs; they are invited guests at the 'banquet of life,' as some poet or other said that came to an end in the work-house."

"How do you know this when I do not?" d'Esgrignon artlessly returned.

"You are sure to be the last to know it, just as she is sure to be the last to hear that you are in debt."

"I thought she had a hundred thousand livres a year," said d'Esgrignon.

"Her husband," replied de Marsay, "lives apart from her. He stays with his regiment and practices economy, for he has one or two little debts of his own as well, has our dear duke. Where do you come from? Just learn to do as we do and keep our friends' accounts for them. Mademoiselle Diane (I fell in love with her for the name's sake), Mademoiselle Diane d'Uxelles brought her husband sixty thousand livres of income; for the last eight years she has lived as if she had two hundred thousand. It is perfectly plain that at this moment her lands are mortgaged up to their full value; some fine morning the crash must come, and the angel will be put to flight by—must it be said?—by sheriff's officers that have the effrontery to lay hands on an angel just as they might take hold of one of us."

"Poor angel!"

"Lord ! it costs a great deal to dwell in a Parisian heaven ; you must whiten your wings and your complexion every morning," said Rastignac.

Now as the thought of confessing his debts to his beloved Diane had passed through d'Esgrignon's mind, something like a shudder ran through him when he remembered that he still owed sixty thousand francs, to say nothing of bills to come for another ten thousand. He went back melancholy enough. His friends remarked his ill-disguised preoccupation, and spoke of it among themselves at dinner.

"Young d'Esgrignon is getting out of his depth. He is not up to Paris. He will blow his brains out. A little fool !" and so on and so on.

D'Esgrignon, however, promptly took comfort. His servant brought him two letters. The first was from Chesnel. A letter from Chesnel smacked of the stale grumbling faithfulness of honesty and its consecrated formulas. With all respect he put it aside till the evening. But the second letter he read with unspeakable pleasure. In Ciceronian phrases, du Croisier groveled before him, like a Sganarelle before a G ron te, begging the young count in future to spare him the affront of first depositing the amount of the bills which he should condescend to draw. The concluding phrase seemed meant to convey the idea that here was an open cash-box full of coin at the service of the noble d'Esgrignon family. So strong was the impression that Victurnien, like Sganarelle or Mascarille in the play, like everybody else who feels a twinge of conscience at his finger-tips, made an involuntary gesture.

Now that he was sure of unlimited credit with the Kellers, he opened Chesnel's letter gaily. He had expected four full pages, full of expostulation to the brim ; he glanced down the sheet for the familiar words "prudence," "honor," "determination to do right," and the like, and saw something else instead which made his head swim.

“MONSIEUR LE COMTE:—Of all my fortune I have now but two hundred thousand francs left. I beg of you not to exceed that amount, if you should do one of the most devoted servants of your family the honor of taking it. I present my respects to you.
CHESNEL.”

“He is one of Plutarch’s men,” Victurnien said to himself, as he tossed the letter on the table. He felt chagrined; such magnanimity made him feel very small.

“There! one must reform,” he thought; and instead of going to a restaurant and spending fifty or sixty francs over his dinner, he retrenched by dining with the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, and told her about the letter.

“I should like to see that man,” she said, letting her eyes shine like two fixed stars.

“What would you do?”

“Why, he should manage my affairs for me.”

Diane de Maufrigneuse was divinely dressed; she meant her toilet to do honor to Victurnien. The levity with which she treated his affairs, or, more properly speaking, his debts, fascinated him.

The charming pair went to the Italiens. Never had that beautiful and enchanting woman looked more seraphic, more ethereal. Nobody in the house could have believed that she had debts which reached the sum-total mentioned by de Marsay that very morning. No single one of the cares of earth had touched that sublime forehead of hers, full of woman’s pride of the highest kind. In her, a pensive air seemed to be some gleam of an earthly love, nobly extinguished. The men for the most part were wagering that Victurnien, with his handsome figure, laid her under contribution; while the women, sure of their rival’s subterfuge, admired her as Michael Angelo admired Raphael, *in pectus*. Victurnien loved Diane, according to one of these ladies, for the sake of her hair—she had the most beautiful fair hair in

France ; another maintained that Diane's pallor was her principal merit, for she was not really well shaped, her dress made the most of her figure ; yet others thought that Victurnien loved her for her foot, her one good point, for she had a flat figure. But (and this brings the present-day manner of Paris before you in an astonishing manner) whereas all the men said that the duchess was subsidizing Victurnien's splendor, the women, on the other hand, gave people to understand that it was Victurnien who paid for the angel's wing-bills, as Rastignac said.

As they drove back again, Victurnien had it on the tip of his tongue a score of times to open this chapter, for the duchess' debts weighed more heavily upon his mind than his own ; and a score of times his purpose died away before the attitude of the divine creature beside him. He could see her by the light of the carriage lamps ; she was bewitching in the love-languor which always seemed to be extorted by the violence of passion from her madonna's purity. The duchess did not fall into the mistake of talking of her virtue, of her angel's estate, as provincial women, her imitators, do. She was far too clever. She made him, for whom she made such great sacrifices, think these things for himself. At the end of six months she could make him feel that a harmless kiss on her hand was a deadly sin ; she contrived that every grace should be extorted from her, and this with such consummate art that it was impossible not to feel that she was more an angel than ever when she yielded.

None but Parisian women are clever enough always to give a new charm to the moon, to romanticize the stars, to roll in the same sack of charcoal and emerge each time whiter than ever. This is the highest refinement of intellectual and Parisian civilization. Women beyond the Rhine or the English Channel believe nonsense of this sort when they utter it ; while your Parisienne makes her lover believe that she is an angel, the better to add to his bliss by flattering his vanity

on both sides—temporal and spiritual. Certain persons, detractors of the duchess, maintain that she was the first dupe of her own white magic. A wicked slander. The duchess believed in nothing but herself.

By the end of the year 1823, the Kellers had supplied Victurnien with two hundred thousand francs, and neither Chesnel nor Mlle. Armande knew anything about it. He had had, beside, two thousand crowns from Chesnel at one time and another, the better to hide the sources on which he was drawing. He wrote lying letters to his poor father and aunt, who lived on, happy and deceived, like most happy people under the sun. The insidious current of life in Paris was bringing a dreadful catastrophe upon the great and noble house; and only one person was in the secret of it. This was du Croisier. He rubbed his hands gleefully as he went past in the dark and looked in at the Antiquities. He had good hope of attaining his ends; and his ends were not, as heretofore, the simple ruin of the d'Esgrignons, but the dishonor of their house. He felt instinctively at such times that his revenge was at hand; he scented it in the wind! He had been sure of it, indeed, from the day when he discovered that the young count's burden of debt was growing too heavy for the boy to bear.

Du Croisier's first step was to rid himself of his most hated enemy, the venerable Chesnel. The good old man lived in the Rue du Bercail, in a house with a steep-pitched roof. There was a little paved courtyard in front, where the rose-bushes grew and clambered up to the windows of the upper story. Behind lay a little country garden, with its box-edged borders, shut in by damp, gloomy-looking walls. The prim, gray-painted street door, with its wicket opening and bell attached, announced quite as plainly as the official escutcheon that "a notary lives here."

It was half-past five o'clock in the afternoon, at which hour the old man usually sat digesting his dinner. He had drawn

his black leather-covered armchair before the fire, and put on his armor, a painted pasteboard contrivance shaped like a top boot, which protected his stockinged legs from the heat of the fire; for it was one of the good man's habits to sit for a while after dinner with his feet on the dogs and to stir up the glowing coals. He always ate too much; he was fond of good living. Alas! if it had not been for that little failing, would he not have been more perfect than it is permitted to mortal man to be? Chesnel had finished his cup of coffee. His old housekeeper had just taken away the tray which had been used for this purpose for the last twenty years. He was waiting for his clerks to go before he himself went out for his game at cards, and meanwhile he was thinking—no need to ask of whom or what. A day seldom passed but he asked himself: "Where is *he*? What is *he* doing?" He thought that the count was in Italy with the fair Duchesse de Maufrigneuse.

When every franc of a man's fortune has come to him, not by inheritance, but through his own earning and saving, it is one of his sweetest pleasures to look back upon the pains that have gone to the making of it, and then to plan out a future for his crowns. This it is to conjugate the verb "to enjoy" in every tense. And the old lawyer, whose affections were all bound up in a single attachment, was thinking that all the carefully chosen, well-tilled land which he had pinched and scraped to buy would one day go to round out the d'Esgrignon estates, and the thought doubled his pleasure. His pride swelled as he sat at his ease in the old armchair; and the building of glowing coals, which he raised with the tongs, sometimes seemed to him to be the old noble house built up again, thanks to his care. He pictured the young count's prosperity, and told himself that he had done well to live for such an aim. Chesnel was not lacking in intelligence; sheer goodness was not the sole source of his great devotion; he had a pride of his own; he was like the nobles who used to rebuild a pillar in a cathedral to inscribe their name upon it;

he meant his name to be remembered by the great house which he had restored. Future generations of d'Esgrignons should speak of old Chesnel. Just at this point his old housekeeper came in with signs of extreme alarm in her countenance.

"Is the house on fire, Brigitte?"

"Something of the sort," said she. "Here is Monsieur du Croisier wanting to speak to you——"

"Monsieur du Croisier," repeated the old lawyer. A stab of cold misgiving gave him so sharp a pang at the heart that he dropped the tongs. "Monsieur du Croisier here!" thought he, "our chief enemy!"

Du Croisier came in at that moment, like a cat that scents milk in a dairy. He made a bow, seated himself quietly in the easy-chair which the lawyer brought forward, and produced a bill for two hundred and twenty-seven thousand francs, principal and interest, the total amount of sums advanced to M. Victurnien in bills of exchange drawn upon du Croisier, and duly honored by him. Of these, he now demanded immediate repayment, with a threat of proceeding to extremities with the heir-presumptive of the house. Chesnel turned the unlucky letters over one by one, and asked the enemy to keep the secret. This he engaged to do if he were paid within forty-eight hours. He was pressed for money; he had obliged various manufacturers; and there followed a series of the financial fictions by which neither notaries nor borrowers are deceived. Chesnel's eyes were dim; he could scarcely keep back the tears. There was but one way of raising the money; he must mortgage his own lands up to their full value. But when du Croisier learned the difficulty in the way of repayment, he forgot that he was hard pressed; he no longer wanted ready money, and suddenly came out with a proposal to buy the old lawyer's property. The sale was completed within two days. Poor Chesnel could not bear the thought of the son of the house undergoing a five years' imprisonment for debt. So in a few days' time nothing remained to him but

his practice, the sums that were due to him, and the house in which he lived. Chesnel, stripped of all his lands, paced to and fro in his private office, paneled with dark oak, his eyes fixed on the beveled edges of the chestnut cross-beams of the ceiling, or on the trellised vines in the garden outside. He was not thinking of his farms now, nor of Le Jard, his dear house in the country ; not he.

"What will become of him? He ought to come back ; they must marry him to some rich heiress," he said to himself ; and his eyes were dim, his head heavy.

How to approach Mlle. Armande, and in what words to break the news to her, he did not know. The man who had just paid the debts of the family quaked at the thought of confessing these things. He went from the Rue du Bercaill to the Hôtel d'Esgrignon with pulses throbbing like some girl's heart when she leaves her father's roof by stealth, not to return again till she is a mother and her heart is broken.

Mlle. Armande had just received a charming letter, charming in its hypocrisy. Her nephew was the happiest man under the sun. He had been to the baths, he had been traveling in Italy with Mme. de Maufrigneuse, and now sent his journal to his aunt. Every sentence was instinct with love. There were enchanting descriptions of Venice and fascinating appreciations of the great works of Venetian art ; there were most wonderful pages full of the Duomo at Milan, and again of Florence ; he described the Apennines, and how they differed from the Alps, and how in some village like Chiavari happiness lay all around you, ready made.

The poor aunt was under the spell. She saw the far-off country of love ; she saw, hovering above the land, the angel whose tenderness gave to all that beauty a burning glow. She was drinking in the letter at long draughts ; how should it have been otherwise ! The girl who had put love from her was now a woman ripened by repressed and pent-up passion, by all the longings continually and gladly offered up as a sacrifice on

the altar of the hearth. Mlle. Armande was not like the duchess. She did not look like an angel. She was rather like the little, straight, slim and slender, ivory-tinted statues, which those wonderful sculptors, the builders of cathedrals, placed here and there about the buildings. Wild plants sometimes find a hold in the damp niches, and weave a crown of beautiful bluebell flowers about the carved stone. At this moment the blue buds were unfolding in the fair saint's eyes. Mlle. Armande loved the charming couple as if they stood apart from real life; she saw nothing wrong in the married woman's love for Victurnien; any other woman she would have judged harshly; but, in this case, not to have loved her nephew would have been the unpardonable sin. Aunts, mothers, and sisters have a code of their own for nephews and sons and brothers.

Mlle. Armande was in Venice; she saw the lines of fairy palaces that stand on either side of the Grand Canal; she was sitting in Victurnien's gondola; he was telling her what happiness it had been to feel that the duchess' beautiful hand lay in his own, to know that she loved him as they floated together on the breast of the amorous Queen of Italian seas. But even in that moment of bliss, such as angels know, some one appeared on the garden walk. It was Chesnel! Alas! the sound of his tread on the gravel might have been the sound of the sands running from Death's hour-glass to be trodden under his unshod feet. The sound, the sight of a dreadful hopelessness in Chesnel's face, gave her that painful shock which follows a sudden recall of the senses when the soul has sent them forth into the world of dreams.

"What is it?" she cried, as if some stab had pierced to her heart.

"All is lost!" said Chesnel. "Monsieur le Comte will bring dishonor upon the house if we do not set it in order." He held out the bills, and described the agony of the last few days in a few simple but vigorous and touching words.

"He is deceiving us! The miserable boy!" cried Mlle. Armande, her heart swelling as the blood surged back to it in heavy throbs.

"Let us each say *mea culpa*,* mademoiselle," the old lawyer said stoutly; "we have always allowed him to have his own way; he needed stern guidance; he could not have it from you with your inexperience of life; nor from me, for he would not listen to me. He has had no mother."

"Fate sometimes deals terribly with a noble house in decay," said Mlle. Armande, with tears in her eyes.

The marquis came up as she spoke. He had been walking up and down the garden while he read the letter sent by his son after his return. Victurnien gave his itinerary from an aristocrat's point of view; telling how he had been welcomed by the greatest Italian families of Genoa, Turin, Milan, Florence, Venice, Rome, and Naples. This flattering reception he owed to his name, he said, and partly, perhaps, to the duchess as well. In short, he had made his appearance magnificently and as befitted a d'Esgrignon.

"Have you been at your old tricks, Chesnel?" asked the marquis.

Mlle. Armande made Chesnel an eager sign, dreadful to see. They understood each other. The poor father, the flower of feudal honor, must die with all his illusions. A compact of silence and devotion was ratified between the two noble hearts by a simple inclination of the head.

"Ah! Chesnel, it was not exactly in this way that the d'Esgrignons went into Italy at the end of the fourteenth century, when Marshal Trivulzio, in the service of the King of France, served under a d'Esgrignon, who had a Bayard too under his orders. Other times, other pleasures. And, for that matter, the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse is at least the equal of a Marchesa di Spinola."

And, on the strength of his genealogical tree, the old man

* I am the culprit.

swung himself off with a coxcomb's air, as if he himself had once made a conquest of the Marchesa di Spinola, and still possessed the duchess of to-day.

The two companions in unhappiness were left together on the garden bench, with the same thought for a bond of union. They sat for a long time, saying little save vague, unmeaning words, watching the father walk away in his happiness, gesticulating as if he were talking to himself.

"What will become of him now?" Mlle. Armande asked after a while.

"Du Croisier has sent instructions to the Kellers; he is not to be allowed to draw any more without authorization."

"And there are debts?" continued Mlle. Armande.

"I am afraid so."

"If he is left without resources, what will he do?"

"I dare not answer that question to myself."

"But he must be drawn out of that life, he must come back to us, or he will have nothing left."

"And nothing else left to him," Chesnel said gloomily. But Mlle. Armande as yet did not and could not understand the full force of those words.

"Is there any hope of getting him away from that woman, that duchess? Perhaps she leads him on."

"He would not stick at a crime to be with her," said Chesnel, trying to pave the way to an intolerable thought by others less intolerable.

"Crime," repeated Mlle. Armande. "Oh, Chesnel, no one but you would think of such a thing!" she added, with a withering look; before such a look from a woman's eyes no mortal can stand. "There is but one crime that a noble can commit—the crime of high treason; and when he is beheaded, the block is covered with a black cloth, as it is for kings."

"The times have changed very much," said Chesnel, shaking his head. Victurnien had thinned his last thin, white

hairs. "Our Martyr-King did not die like the English King Charles."

That thought soothed Mlle. Armande's splendid indignation; a shudder ran through her; but still she did not realize what Chesnel meant.

"To-morrow we will decide what we must do," she said; "it needs thought. At the worst, we have our lands."

"Yes," said Chesnel. "You and Monsieur le Marquis own the estate conjointly; but the larger part of it is yours. You can raise money upon it without saying a word to him."

The players at whist, reversis, boston, and backgammon noticed that evening that Mlle. Armande's features, usually so serene and pure, showed signs of agitation.

"That poor heroic child!" said the old Marquise de Castéran, "she must be suffering still. A woman never knows what her sacrifices to her family may cost her."

Next day it was arranged with Chesnel that Mlle. Armande should go to Paris to snatch her nephew from perdition. If any one could carry off Victurnien, was it not the woman whose mother's heart yearned over him? Mlle. Armande made up her mind that she would go to the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse and tell her all. Still, some sort of pretext was necessary to explain the journey to the marquis and the whole town. At some cost to her maidenly delicacy, Mlle. Armande allowed it to be thought that she was suffering from a complaint which called for a consultation of skilled and celebrated physicians. Goodness knows whether the town talked of this or not! But Mlle. Armande saw that something far more to her than her own reputation was at stake. She set out. Chesnel brought her his last bag of louis; she took it, without paying any attention to it, as she took her white capuchine and thread mittens.

"Generous girl! What grace!" he said, as he put her into the carriage with her maid, a woman who looked like a gray sister.

Du Croisier had thought out his revenge, as provincials think out everything. For studying out a question in all its bearings, there are no people in this world like savages, peasants, and provincials; and this is how, when they proceed from thought to action, you find every contingency provided for from beginning to end. Diplomats are children compared with these classes of mammals; they have time before them, an element which is lacking to those people who are obliged to think about a great many things, to superintend the progress of all kinds of schemes, to look forward for all sorts of contingencies in the wider interests of human affairs. Had du Croisier sounded poor Victurnien's nature so well that he foresaw how easily the young count would lend himself to his schemes of revenge? Or was he merely profiting by an opportunity for which he had been on the watch for years? One circumstance there was, to be sure, in his manner of preparing his stroke, which shows a certain skill. Who was it that gave du Croisier warning of the moment? Was it the Kellers? Or could it have been President du Ronceret's son, then finishing his law studies in Paris?

Du Croisier wrote to Victurnien, telling him that the Kellers had been instructed to advance no more money; and that letter was timed to arrive just as the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse was in the utmost perplexity, and the Comte d'Esgrignon consumed by the sense of a poverty as dreadful as it was cunningly hidden. The wretched young man was exerting all his ingenuity to seem as if he were wealthy!

Now in the letter which informed the victim that in future the Kellers would make no further advances without security, there was a tolerably wide space left between the forms of an exaggerated respect and the signature. It was quite easy to tear off the best part of the letter and convert it into a bill of exchange for any amount. The diabolical missive had even been inclosed in an envelope, so that the other side of the sheet was blank. When it arrived, Victurnien was writhing

in the lowest depths of despair. After two years of the most prosperous, sensual, thoughtless, and luxurious life, he found himself face to face with the most inexorable poverty; it was an absolute impossibility to procure money. There had been some throes of crisis before the journey came to an end. With the duchess' help he had managed to extort various sums from bankers; but it had been with the greatest difficulty, and, moreover, those very amounts were about to start up again before him as overdue bills of exchange in all their rigor, with a stern summons to pay from the Bank of France and the commercial court. All through the enjoyments of those last weeks the unhappy boy had felt the point of the commander's sword; at every supper-party he heard, like Don Juan, the heavy tread of the statue outside upon the stairs. He felt an unaccountable creeping of the flesh, a warning that the sirocco of debt is nigh at hand. He reckoned on chance. For five years he had never turned up a blank in the lottery; his purse had always been replenished. After Chesnel had come du Croisier (he told himself); after du Crosier surely another gold mine would pour out its wealth. And beside, he was winning great sums at play; his luck at play had saved him several unpleasant steps already; and often a wild hope sent him to the Salon des Étrangers only to lose his winnings afterward at whist at the club. His life for the past two months had been like the immortal finale of Mozart's "*Don Giovanni*;" and of a truth, if a young man has come to such a plight as Victurnien's, that finale is enough to make him shudder. Can anything better prove the enormous power of music than that sublime rendering of the disorder and confusion arising out of a life wholly given up to sensual indulgence? that fearful picture of a deliberate effort to shut out the thought of debts and duels, deceit and evil luck? In that music Mozart disputes the palm with Molière. The terrific finale, with its glow, its power, its despair and laughter, its grisly spectres and elfish women, centres about the prodigal's

last effort made in the after-supper heat of wine, the frantic struggle which ends the drama. Victurnien was living through this infernal poem, and alone. He saw visions of himself—a friendless, solitary outcast, reading the words carved on the stone, the last words on the last page of the book that had held him spellbound—*THE END!*

Yes; for him all would be at an end, and that soon. Already he saw the cold, ironical eyes which his associates would turn upon him, and their amusement over his downfall. Some of them he knew were playing high on that gambling-table kept open all day long at the Bourse, or in private houses, at the clubs, and anywhere and everywhere in Paris; but not one of these men could spare a banknote to save an intimate. There was no help for it—Chesnel must be ruined. He had devoured Chesnel's living.

He sat with the duchess in their box at the Italiens, the whole house envying them their happiness; and while he smiled at her, all the Furies were tearing at his heart. Indeed, to give some idea of the depths of doubt, despair, and incredulity in which the boy was groveling; he who so clung to life—the life which the angel had made so fair—who so loved it that he would have stooped to baseness merely to live; he, the pleasure-loving scapegrace, the degenerate d'Esgrignon, had even taken out his pistols, had gone so far as to think of suicide. He who would never have brooked the appearance of an insult was abusing himself in language which no man is likely to hear except from himself.

He left du Croisier's letter laying open on the bed. Joséphin had brought it in at nine o'clock. Victurnien's furniture had been seized, but he slept none the less. After he came back from the opera, he and the duchess had gone to a voluptuous retreat, where they often spent a few hours together after the most brilliant court balls and evening parties and gayeties. Appearances were very cleverly saved. Their love-nest was a garret like any other to all appearance; Mme.

de Maufrigneuse was obliged to bow her head with its court feathers or the wreath of flowers to enter the doorway; but within all the peris of the East had made the chamber fair. And now that the count was on the brink of ruin, he had longed to bid farewell to the dainty nest, which he had built to realize a day-dream worthy of his angel. Presently adversity would break the enchanted eggs; there would be no brood of white doves, no brilliant tropical birds, no more of the thousand bright-winged fancies which hover above our heads even to the last days of our lives. Alas! alas! in three days he must be gone; his bills had fallen into the hands of the money-lenders, the law proceedings had reached the last stage.

An evil thought crossed his brain. He would fly with the duchess; they would live in some undiscovered nook in the wilds of North or South America; but—he would fly with a fortune, and leave his creditors to confront their bills. To carry out the plan, he had only to cut off the lower portion of that letter with du Croisier's signature, and to fill in the figures to turn it into a bill, and present it to the Kellers. There was a dreadful struggle with temptation; tears were shed, but the honor of the family triumphed, subject to one condition. Victurnien wanted to be sure of his beautiful Diane; he would do nothing unless she should consent to their flight. So he went to the duchess in the Rue Faubourg Saint-Honoré, and found her in coquettish morning dress, which cost as much in thought as in money, a fit dress in which to begin to play the part of Angel at eleven o'clock in the morning.

Mme. de Maufrigneuse was somewhat pensive. Cares of a similar kind were gnawing her mind; but she took them gallantly. Of all the various feminine organizations classified by physiologists, there is one that has something indescribably terrible about it. Such women combine strength of soul and clear insight, with a faculty for prompt decision, and a reck-

lessness, or rather resolution, in a crisis which would shake a man's nerves. And these powers lie out of sight beneath an appearance of the most graceful helplessness. Such women only among womankind afford examples of a phenomenon which Buffon recognized in men alone, to wit, the union, or rather the disunion, of two different natures in one human being. Other women are wholly women; wholly tender, wholly devoted, wholly mothers, completely null and completely tire-some; nerves and brain and blood are all in harmony; but the duchess, and others like her, are capable of rising to the highest heights of feeling, or of showing the most selfish insensibility. It is one of the glories of Molière that he has given us a wonderful portrait of such a woman, from one point of view only, in that greatest of his full-length figures—Célimène; Célimène is the typical aristocratic woman, as Figaro, the second edition of Panurge, represents the people.

So the duchess, being overwhelmed with debt, laid it upon herself to give no more than a moment's thought to the avalanche of cares, and to take her resolution once and for all; Napoleon could take up or lay down the burden of his thoughts in precisely the same way. The duchess possessed the faculty of standing aloof from herself; she could look on as a spectator at the crash when it came, instead of submitting to be buried beneath. This was certainly great, but repulsive in a woman. When she awoke in the morning she collected her thoughts; and by the time she had begun to dress she had looked at the danger in its fullest extent and faced the possibilities of terrific downfall. She pondered. Should she take refuge in a foreign country? Or should she go to the King and declare her debts to him? Or again, should she fascinate a du Tillet or a Nucingen, and gamble on the Stock Exchange to pay her creditors? The city man would find the money; he would be intelligent enough to bring her nothing but the profits, without so much as mentioning the losses, a piece of

delicacy which would gloss all over. The catastrophe, and these various ways of averting it, had all been reviewed quite coolly, calmly, and without trepidation.

As a naturalist takes up some king of butterflies and fastens him down on cotton-wool with a pin, so Mme. de Maufrigneuse had plucked love out of her heart while she pondered the necessity of the moment, and was quite ready to replace the beautiful passion on its immaculate setting so soon as her duchess' coronet was safe. *She* knew none of the hesitation which Cardinal Richelieu hid from all the world but Père Joseph; none of the doubts that Napoleon kept at first entirely to himself. "Either the one or the other," she told herself.

She was sitting by the fire, giving orders for her toilet for a drive in the Bois if the weather should be fine, when Victurnien came in.

The Comte d'Esgrignon, with all his stifled capacity, his so keen intellect, was in exactly the state which might have been looked for in the woman. His heart was beating violently, the perspiration broke out over him as he stood in his dandy's trappings; he was afraid as yet to lay a hand on the cornerstone which upheld the pyramid of his life with Diane. So much it cost him to know the truth. The cleverest men are fain to deceive themselves on one or two points if the truth once known is likely to humiliate them in their own eyes, and damage themselves with themselves. Victurnien forced his own irresolution into the field by committing himself.

"What is the matter with you?" Diane de Maufrigneuse had said at once, at the sight of her beloved Victurnien's face.

"Why, dear Diane, I am in such utter perplexity; a man gone to the bottom and at his last gasp is happy in comparison."

"Pshaw! it is nothing," said she; "you are a child. Let us see now; tell me about it."

"I am hopelessly in debt. I have come to the end of my tether."

"Is that all?" said she, smiling at him. "Money matters can always be arranged somehow or other; nothing is irretrievable except disasters in love."

Victurnien's mind being set at rest by this swift comprehension of his position, he unrolled the bright-colored web of his life for the last two years and a half; but it was the seamy side of it which he displayed with something of genius, and still more of wit, to his Diane. He told his tale with the inspiration of the moment, which fails no one in great crises; he had sufficient artistic skill to set it off by a varnish of delicate scorn for men and things. It was an aristocrat who spoke. And the duchess listened as she could listen.

One knee was raised, for she sat with her foot on a stool. She rested her elbow on her knee and leaned her face on her hand so that her fingers closed daintily over her shapely chin. Her eyes never left his; but thoughts by myriads flitted under the blue surface, like gleams of stormy light between two clouds. Her forehead was calm, her mouth gravely intent; grave with love; her lips were knotted fast by Victurnien's lips. To have her listening thus was to believe that a divine love flowed from her heart. Wherefore, when the count had proposed flight to this soul, so closely knit to his own, he could not help crying:

"You are an angel!"

The fair Maufrigneuse made silent answer; but she had not spoken as yet.

"Good, very good," she said at last. (She had not given herself up to the love expressed in her face; her mind had been entirely absorbed by deep-laid schemes which she kept to herself.) "But *that* is not the question, dear." (The "angel" was only "that" by this time.) "Let us think of your affairs. Yes, we will go, and the sooner the better. Arrange it all; I will follow you. It is glorious to leave Paris

and the world behind. I will set about my preparations in such a way that no one can suspect anything."

I will follow you! Just so Mlle. Mars might have spoken those words to send a thrill through two thousand listening men and women. When a Duchesse de Maufrigneuse offers, in such words, to make such a sacrifice to love, she has paid her debt. How should Victurnien speak of sordid details after that? He could so much the better hide his schemes, because Diane was particularly careful not to inquire into them. She was now, and always, as De Marsay said, an invited guest at a banquet wreathed with roses, a banquet which mankind, as in duty bound, made ready for her.

Victurnien would not go till the promise had been sealed. He must draw courage from his happiness before he could bring himself to do a deed on which, as he inwardly told himself, people would be certain to put a bad construction. Still (and this was the thought that decided him) he counted on his aunt and father to hush up the affair; he even counted on Chesnel. Chesnel would think of one more compromise. Beside, "this business," as he called it in his thoughts, was the only way of raising money on the family estate. With three hundred thousand francs, he and Diane would lead a happy life hidden in some palace in Venice; and there they would forget the world. They went through their romance in advance.

Next day Victurnien made out a bill for three hundred thousand francs, and took it to the Kellers. The Kellers advanced the money, for du Croisier happened to have a balance at the time; but they wrote to let him know that he must not draw again on them without giving them notice. Du Croisier, much astonished, asked for a statement of accounts. It was sent. Everything was explained. The day of his vengeance had arrived.

When Victurnien had drawn "his" money, he took it to

Mme. de Maufrigneuse. She locked up the banknotes in her desk, and proposed to bid the world farewell by going to the opera to see it for the last time. Victurnien was thoughtful, absent, and uneasy. He was beginning to reflect. He thought that his seat in the duchess' box might cost him dear; that perhaps, when he had put the three hundred thousand francs in safety, it would be better to travel post, to fall at Chesnel's feet, and tell him all. But, before they left the opera-house, the duchess, in spite of herself, gave Victurnien an adorable glance, her eyes were shining with the desire to go back once more to bid farewell to the nest which she loved so much. And boy that he was, he lost a night.

The next day, at three o'clock, he was back again at the Hôtel de Maufrigneuse; he had come to take the duchess' orders for that night's escape. And, "Why should we go?" asked she; "I have thought it all out. The Vicomtesse de Beauséant and the Duchesse de Langeais disappeared. If I go too, it will be something quite commonplace. We will brave the storm. It will be a far finer thing to do. I am sure of success." Victurnien's eyes dazzled; he felt as if his skin were dissolving and the blood oozing out all over him.

"What is the matter with you?" cried the fair Diane, noticing a hesitation which a woman never forgives. Your truly adroit lover will hasten to agree with any fancy that Woman may take into her head, and suggest reasons for doing otherwise, while leaving her free exercise of her right to change her mind, her intentions, and sentiments generally as often as she pleases. Victurnien was angry for the first time, angry with the wrath of a weak man of poetic temperament; it was a storm of rain and lightning flashes, but no thunder followed. The angel on whose faith he had risked more than his life, the honor of his ancient house, was being very roughly handled.

"So," said she, "we have come to this after eighteen months of tenderness! You are unkind, very unkind. Go

away!—I do not want to see you again. I thought that you loved me. You do not.”

“*I do not love you?*” repeated he, thunderstruck by the reproach.

“No, monsieur.”

“And yet——” he cried. “Ah! if you but knew what I have just done for your sake!”

“And how have you done so much for me, monsieur? As if a man ought not to do anything for a woman that has done so much for him.”

“You are not worthy to know it!” Victurnien cried in a passion of anger.

“Oh!”

After that sublime “Oh!” Diane bowed her head on her hand and sat, still, cold, and implacable as angels naturally may be expected to do, seeing that they share none of the passions of humanity. At the sight of the woman he loved in this terrible attitude, Victurnien forgot his danger. Had he not just that moment wronged the most angelic creature on earth? He longed for forgiveness, he threw himself before her, he kissed her feet, he pleaded, he wept. Two whole hours the unhappy young man spent in all kinds of follies, only to meet the same cold face, while the great silent tears, dropping one by one, were dried as soon as they fell lest the unworthy lover should try to wipe them away. The duchess was acting a great agony, one of those hours which stamp the woman who passes through them as something august and sacred.

Two more hours went by. By this time the count had gained possession of Diane’s hand; it felt cold and spiritless. The beautiful hand, with all the treasures in its grasp, might have been supple wood; there was nothing of Diane in it; he had taken it, it had not been given to him. As for Victurnien, the spirit had ebbed out of his frame, he had ceased to think. He would not have seen the sun in heaven. What was to be

done? What course should he take? What resolution should he make? The man who can keep his head in such circumstances must be made of the same stuff as the convict who spent the night in robbing the Bibliothèque Royale of its gold medals, and repaired to his honest brother in the morning with a request to melt down the plunder. "What is to be done?" cried the brother. "Make me some coffee," replied the thief. Victurnien sank into a bewildered stupor, darkness settled down over his brain. Visions of past rapture flitted across the misty gloom like the figures that Raphael painted against a black background; to these he must bid farewell. Inexorable and disdainful, the duchess played with the tip of her scarf. She looked in irritation at Victurnien from time to time; she coquetted with memories, she spoke to her lover of his rivals as if anger had finally decided her to prefer one of them to a man who could so change in one moment after twenty-eight months of love.

"Ah! that charming young Félix de Vandenesse, so faithful as he was to Madame de Mortsau, would never have permitted himself such a scene! He can love, can de Vandenesse! De Marsay, that terrible de Marsay, such a tiger as every one thought him, was rough with other men; but, like all strong men, he kept his gentleness for women. Montriveau trampled the Duchesse de Langeais under foot, as Othello killed Desdemona, in a burst of fury which at any rate proved the extravagance of his love. It was not like a paltry squabble. There was rapture in being so crushed. Little, fair-haired, slim, and slender men loved to torment women; they could only reign over poor, weak creatures; it pleased them to have some ground for believing that they were men. The tyranny of love was their one chance of asserting their power. She did not know why she had put herself at the mercy of fair hair. Such men as de Marsay, Montriveau, and Vandenesse, dark-haired and well grown, had a ray of sunlight in their eyes."

It was a storm of epigrams. Her speeches, like bullets, came hissing past his ears. Every word that Diane hurled at him was triple-barbed; she humiliated, stung, and wounded him with an art that was all her own, as half a score of savages can torture an enemy bound to a stake.

"You are mad!" he cried at last, at the end of his patience, and out he went in God knows what mood. He drove as if he had never handled the reins before, locked his wheels in the wheels of other vehicles, collided with the curb-stone in the Place Louis-Quinze, went he knew not whither. The horse, left to its own devices, made a bolt for the stable along the Quai d'Orsay; but as he turned into the Rue de l'Université, Joséphin appeared to stop the runaway.

"You cannot go home, sir," the old man said, with a scared look on his honest face; "they have come with a warrant to arrest you."

Victurnien thought that he was to be arrested on the criminal charge, albeit there had not been time for the public prosecutor to receive his instructions. He had forgotten the matter of the bills of exchange, which had been stirred up again for some days past in the form of orders to pay, brought by the officers of the court with accompaniments in the shape of bailiffs, men in possession, magistrates, commissaries, policemen, and other representatives of social order. Like most guilty creatures, Victurnien had forgotten everything but his crime.

"It is all over with me," he cried.

"No, Monsieur le Comte, drive as fast as you can to the Hôtel du Bon la Fontaine, in the Rue de Grenelle. Mademoiselle Armande is waiting there for you, the horses have been put in, she will take you with her."

Victurnien, in his trouble, caught like a drowning man at the branch that came to his hand; he rushed off to the inn, reached the place, and flung his arms about his aunt. Mlle. Armande cried as if her heart would break; any one might

have thought that she had a share in her nephew's guilt. They stepped into the carriage. A few minutes later they were on the road to Brest, and Paris lay behind them. Victurnien uttered not a sound; he was paralyzed. And when aunt and nephew began to speak, they talked at cross purposes; Victurnien, still laboring under the unlucky misapprehension which flung him into Mlle. Armande's arms, was thinking of his forgery; his aunt had the debts and the bills on her mind.

"You know all, aunt," he had said.

"Poor boy, yes, but we are here. I am not going to scold you just yet. Take heart."

"I must hide somewhere."

"Perhaps—— Yes, it is a very good idea."

"Perhaps I might get into Chesnel's house without being seen if we timed ourselves to arrive in the middle of the night?"

"That will be best. We shall be better able to hide this from my brother. Poor angel! how unhappy he is!" said she, petting the unworthy child.

"Ah! now I begin to know what dishonor means; it has chilled my love."

"Unhappy boy; what bliss and what misery!" And Mlle. Armande drew his fevered face to her breast and kissed his forehead, cold and damp though it was, as the holy women might have kissed the brow of the dead Christ when they laid Him in His grave-clothes. Following out the excellent scheme suggested by the prodigal son, he was brought by night to the quiet house in the Rue du Bercaill; but chance ordered it that by so doing he ran straight into the wolf's jaws, as the saying goes. That evening Chesnel had been making arrangements to sell his connection to M. Lepressoir's head-clerk. M. Lepressoir was the notary employed by the Liberals, just as Chesnel's practice lay among the aristocratic families. The young fellow's relatives were rich enough to

pay Chesnel the considerable sum of a hundred thousand francs in cash.

Chesnel was rubbing his hands. "A hundred thousand francs will go a long way in buying up debts," he thought. "The young man is paying a high rate of interest on his loans. We will lock him up down here. I will go yonder myself and bring those curs to terms."

Chesnel, honest Chesnel, upright, worthy Chesnel, called his darling Comte Victurnien's creditors "curs."

Meanwhile his successor was making his way along the Rue du Bercail just as Mlle. Armande's traveling carriage turned into it. Any young man might be expected to feel some curiosity if he saw a traveling carriage stop at a notary's door in such a town and at such an hour of the night; the young man in question was sufficiently inquisitive to stand in a doorway and watch. He saw Mlle. Armande alight.

"Mademoiselle d'Esgrignon at this time of night!" said he to himself. "What can be going forward at the d'Esgrignons?"

At the sight of mademoiselle, Chesnel opened the door circumspectly and set down the light which he was carrying; but when he looked out and saw Victurnien, Mlle. Armande's first whispered word made the whole thing plain to him. He looked up and down the street; it seemed quite deserted; he beckoned, and the young count sprang out of the carriage and entered the courtyard. All was lost. Chesnel's successor had discovered Victurnien's hiding-place.

Victurnien was hurried into the house and installed in a room beyond Chesnel's private office. No one could enter it except across the old man's dead body.

"Ah! Monsieur le Comte!" exclaimed Chesnel, notary no longer.

"Yes, monsieur," the count answered, understanding his old friend's exclamation. "I did not listen to you; and now I have fallen into the depths, and I must perish."

"No, no," the good man answered, looking triumphantly from Mlle. Armande to the count. "I have sold my connection. I have been working for a very long time now, and am thinking of retiring. By noon to-morrow I shall have a hundred thousand francs; many things can be settled with that. Mademoiselle, you are tired," he added; "go back to the carriage and go home and sleep. Business to-morrow."

"Is he safe?" returned she, looking at Victurnien.

"Yes,"

She kissed her nephew; a few tears fell on his forehead. Then she went.

"My good Chesnel," said the count, when they began to talk of business, "what are your hundred thousand francs in such a position as mine? You do not know the full extent of my troubles, I think."

Victurnien explained the situation. Chesnel was thunder-struck. But for the strength of his devotion, he would have succumbed to this blow. Tears streamed from the eyes that might well have had no tears left to shed. For a few moments he was a child again, for a few moments he was bereft of his senses; he stood like a man who should find his own house on fire, and through a window see the cradle ablaze and hear the hiss of the flames on his children's curls. He rose to his full height—*il se dresse en pied*, as Amyot would have said; he seemed to grow taller; he raised his withered hands and wrung them despairingly and wildly.

"If only your father may die and never know this, young man! To be a forger is enough; a parricide you must not be. Fly, you say? No. They would condemn you for contempt of court! Oh, wretched boy! Why did you not forge my signature? I would have paid. I should not have taken the bill to the public prosecutor. Now I can do nothing. You have brought me to a stand in the lowest pit in hell!—Du Croisier! What will come of it? What is to be done? If you had killed a man, there might be some help for it.

But forgery—*forgery!* And time—the time is flying,” he went on, shaking his fist toward the old clock. “You will want a sham passport now. One crime leads to another. First,” he added, after a pause, “first of all we must save the house of d’Esgrignon.”

“But the money is still in Madame de Maufrigneuse’s keeping,” exclaimed Victurnien.

“Ah!” exclaimed Chesnel. “Well, there is some hope left—a faint hope. Could we soften du Croisier, I wonder, or buy him over? He shall have all the lands if he likes. I will go to him; I will wake him and offer him all we have. Beside, it was not you who forged that bill; it was I. I will go to jail; I am too old for the hulks, they can only put me in prison.”

“But the body of the bill is in my handwriting,” objected Victurnien, without a sign of surprise at this reckless devotion.

“Idiot!—that is, pardon, Monsieur le Comte. Joséphin should have been made to write it,” the old notary cried wrathfully. “He is a good creature; he would have taken it all on his shoulders. But there is an end of it; the world is falling to pieces,” the old man continued, sinking exhausted into a chair. “Du Croisier is a tiger; we must be careful not to rouse him. What time is it? Where is the draft? If it is at Paris, it might be bought back from the Kellers; they might accommodate us. Ah! but there are dangers on all sides; a single false step means ruin. Money is wanted in any case. But, there! nobody knows you are here, you must live buried away in the cellar if needs must. I will go at once to Paris as fast as I can; I can hear the mail-coach from Brest.”

In a moment the old man recovered the faculties of his youth—his agility and vigor. He packed up clothes for the journey, took money, brought a six-pound loaf to the little room beyond the office, and turned the key on his child by adoption.

"Not a sound in here," he said; "no light at night; and stop here till I come back, or you will go to the hulks. Do you understand, Monsieur le Comte? Yes, *to the hulks!* if anybody in a town like this knows that you are here."

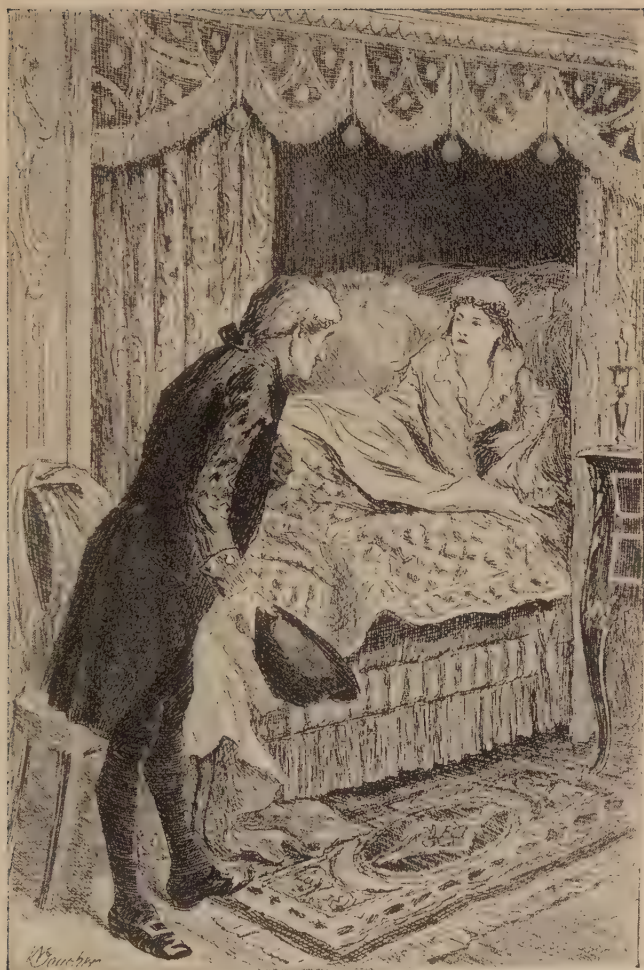
With that Chesnel went out, first telling his housekeeper to give out that he was ill, to allow no one to come into the house, to send everybody away, and to postpone business of every kind for three days. He wheedled the manager of the coach-office, made up a tale for his benefit—he had the makings of an ingenious novelist in him—and obtained a promise that if there should be a place, he should have it, passport or no passport, as well as a further promise to keep the hurried departure a secret. Luckily, the coach was empty when it arrived.

In the middle of the following night Chesnel was set down in Paris. At nine o'clock in the morning he waited on the Kellers, and learned that the fatal draft had returned to du Croisier three days since; but while obtaining this information, he in no way committed himself. Before he went away he inquired whether the draft could be recovered if the amount were refunded. François Keller's answer was to the effect that the document was du Croisier's property, and that it was entirely in his power to keep or return it. Then, in desperation, the old man went to the duchess.

Mme. de Maufrigneuse was not at home to any visitor at that hour. Chesnel, feeling that every moment was precious, sat down in the hall, wrote a few lines, and succeeded in sending them to the lady by dint of wheedling, fascinating, bribing, and commanding the most insolent and inaccessible servants in the world. The duchess was still in bed; but, to the great astonishment of her household, the old man in black knee-breeches, ribbed stockings, and shoes with buckles to them was shown into her room.

"What is it, monsieur?" she asked, posing in her disorder. "What does he want of me, ungrateful that he is?"

"WHAT IS IT, MONSIEUR ?" SHE ASKED, FROWN-
ING IN HER DISORDER.



"It is this, Madame la Duchesse," the good man exclaimed, "you have a hundred thousand crowns belonging to us."

"Yes," began she. "What does it signify——?"

"The money was gained by a forgery, for which we are going to the hulks, a forgery which we committed for love of you," Chesnel said quickly. "How is it that you did not guess it, so clever as you are? Instead of scolding the boy, you ought to have had the truth out of him, and stopped him while there was time, and saved him."

At the first words the duchess understood; she felt ashamed of her behavior to so impassioned a lover, and afraid beside that she might be suspected of complicity. In her wish to prove that she had not touched the money left in her keeping, she lost all regard for appearances; and beside, it did not occur to her that a notary was a man. She flung off the eider-down quilt, sprang to her desk (fitting past the lawyer like an angel out of one of the vignettes which illustrate *Lamartine's* books), held out the notes, and went back in confusion to bed.

"You are an angel, madame." (She was to be an angel for all the world, it seemed.) "But this will not be the end of it. I count upon your influence to save us."

"To save you! I will do it or die! Love that will not shrink from a crime must be love, indeed. Is there a woman in the world for whom such a thing has been done? Poor boy! Come, do not lose time, dear Monsieur Chesnel; and count upon me as upon yourself."

"Madame la Duchesse! Madame la Duchesse!" It was all that he could say, so overcome was he. He cried, he could have danced; but he was afraid of losing his senses, and refrained.

"Between us, we will save him," she said, as he left the room.

Chesnel went straight to *Joséphin*. *Joséphin* unlocked the

young count's desk and writing-table. Very luckily, the notary found letters which might be useful, letters from du Croisier and the Kellers. Then he took a place in a diligence which was just about to start; and, by dint of fees to the postillions, the lumbering vehicle went as quickly as the coach. His two fellow-passengers on the journey happened to be in as great a hurry as he himself, and readily agreed to take their meals in the carriage. Thus swept over the road, the notary reached the Rue du Bercail, after three days of absence, an hour before midnight. And yet he was too late. He saw the gendarmes at the gate, crossed the threshold, and met the young count in the courtyard. Victurnien had been arrested. If Chesnel had had the power, he would, beyond a doubt, have killed the officers and men; as it was, he could only fall on Victurnien's neck.

"If I cannot hush this matter up, you must kill yourself before the indictment is made out," he whispered. But Victurnien had sunk into such stupor that he stared back uncomprehendingly.

"Kill myself?" he repeated.

"Yes. If your courage should fail, my boy, count upon me," said Chesnel, squeezing Victurnien's hand.

In spite of his anguish of mind and tottering limbs, he stood firmly planted, to watch the son of his heart, the Comte d'Esgrignon, go out of the courtyard between two gendarmes, with the commissary, the justice of the peace, and the clerk of the court; and not until the figures had disappeared, and the sound of footsteps had died away into silence, did he recover his firmness and presence of mind.

"You will catch cold, sir," Brigitte remonstrated.

"The devil take you!" cried her aroused and exasperated master.

Never in the nine-and-twenty years that Brigitte had been in his service had she heard such words from him! Her candle fell out of her hands; but Chesnel neither heeded his

housekeeper's alarm nor heard her exclaim. He hurried off toward the Val-Noble.

"He is out of his mind," said she; "after all, it is no wonder. But where is he off to? I cannot possibly go after him. What will become of him? Suppose that he should drown himself!"

And Brigitte went to waken the head-clerk and send him to look along the river-bank; the river had a gloomy reputation just then, for there had lately been two cases of suicide—one a young man full of promise, and the other a girl, a victim of seduction. Chesnel went straight to the Hôtel du Croisier. There lay his only hope. The law requires that a charge of forgery must be brought by a private individual. It was still possible to withdraw if du Croisier chose to admit that there had been a misapprehension; and Chesnel had hopes, even then, of buying the man over.

M. and Mme. du Croisier had much more company than usual that evening. Only a few persons were in the secret. M. du Ronceret, president of the Tribunal; M. Sauvager, deputy public prosecutor; and M. du Coudrai, a registrar of mortgages, who had lost his post by voting on the wrong side, were the only persons who were supposed to know about it; but Mesdames du Ronceret and du Coudrai had told the news, in strict confidence, to one or two intimate friends, so that it had spread half over the semi-noble, semi-bourgeois assembly at M. du Croisier's. Everybody felt the gravity of the situation, but no one ventured to speak of it openly; and, moreover, Mme. du Croisier's attachment to the upper sphere was so well known that people scarcely dared to mention the disaster which had befallen the d'Esgrignons or to ask for particulars. The persons most interested were waiting till good Mme. du Croisier retired, for that lady always retreated to her room at the same hour to perform her religious exercises as far as possible out of her husband's sight.

Du Croisier's adherents, knowing the secret and the plans

of the great commercial power, looked round when the lady of the house disappeared; but there were still several persons present whose opinions or interests marked them out as untrustworthy, so they continued to play. About half-past eleven all had gone save intimates: M. Sauvager, M. Camusot, the examining magistrate, and his wife, M. and Mme. du Ronceret and their son Fabien, M. and Mme. du Coudrai, and Joseph Blondet, the eldest son of an old judge; ten persons in all.

It is told of Talleyrand that one fatal day, three hours after midnight, he suddenly interrupted a game of cards in the Duchesse de Luynes' house by laying down his watch on the table and asking the players whether the Prince de Condé had any child but the Duc d'Enghien.

"Why do you ask?" returned Mme. de Luynes, "when you know so well that he has not."

"Because if the prince has no other son, the House of Condé is now at an end."

There was a moment's pause, and they finished the game. President du Ronceret now did something very similar. Perhaps he had heard the anecdote; perhaps, in political life, little minds and great minds are apt to hit upon the same expression. He looked at his watch, and interrupted the game of boston with—

"At this moment Monsieur le Comte d'Esgrignon is arrested, and that house which has held its head so high is dishonored for ever."

"Then have you got hold of the boy?" du Coudrai cried gleefully.

Every one in the room, with the exception of the president, the deputy, and du Croisier, looked startled.

"He has just been arrested in Chesnel's house, where he was hiding," said the deputy public prosecutor, with the air of a capable but unappreciated public servant, who ought by rights to be minister of police. M. Sauvager, the deputy, was

a thin, tall young man of five-and-twenty, with a lengthy olive-hued countenance, black frizzled hair, and deep-set eyes; the wide, dark rings beneath them were completed by the wrinkled purple eyelids above. With a nose like the beak of some bird of prey, a pinched mouth, and cheeks worn lean with study and hollowed by ambition, he was the very type of a second-rate personage on the lookout for something to turn up, and ready to do anything if so he might get on in the world, while keeping within the limitations of the possible and the forms of law. His pompous expression was an admirable indication of the time-serving eloquence to be expected of him. Chesnel's successor had discovered the young count's hiding-place to him, and he took great credit to himself for his penetration.

The news seemed to come as a shock to the examining magistrate, M. Camusot, who had granted the warrant of arrest on Sauvager's application, with no idea that it was to be executed so promptly. Camusot was short, fair, and fat already, though he was only thirty years old or thereabout; he had the flabby, livid look peculiar to officials who live shut up in their private study or in a court of justice; and his little, pale, yellow eyes were full of the suspicion which is often mistaken for shrewdness.

Mme. Camusot looked at her spouse, as who should say: "Was I not right?"

"Then the case will come on?" was Camusot's comment.

"Could you doubt it?" asked du Coudrai. "Now they have got the count, all is over."

"There is the jury," said Camusot. "In this case, Monsieur le Préfet is sure to take care that, after the challenges from the prosecution and the defense, the jury to a man will be for an acquittal. My advice would be to come to a compromise," he added, turning to du Croisier.

"Compromise!" echoed the president; "why, he is in the hands of justice."

"Acquitted or convicted, the Comte d'Esgrignon will be dishonored all the same," put in Sauvager.

"I am bringing an action,"* said du Croisier. "I shall have Dupin senior. We shall see how the d'Esgrignon family will escape out of his clutches."

"The d'Esgrignons will defend the case and have counsel from Paris; they will have Berryer," said Mme. Camusot. "You will have a Roland for your Oliver."

Du Croisier, M. Sauvager, and the President du Ronceret looked at Camusot, and one thought troubled their minds. The lady's tone, the way in which she flung her proverb in the faces of the eight conspirators against the house d'Esgrignon, caused them inward perturbation, which they dissembled as provincials can dissemble, by dint of lifelong practice in the shifts of a monastic existence. Little Mme. Camusot saw their change of countenance and subsequent composure when they scented opposition on the part of the examining magistrate. When her husband unveiled the thoughts in the back of his own mind, she had tried to plumb the depths of hate in du Croisier's adherents. She wanted to find out how du Croisier had gained over this deputy public prosecutor, who had acted so promptly and so directly in opposition to the views of the central power.

"In any case," continued she, "if celebrated counsel come down from Paris, there is a prospect of a very interesting session in the Court of Assize; but the matter will be snuffed out between the Tribunal and the Court of Appeal. It is only to be expected that the Government should do all that can be done, below the surface, to save a young man who comes of a great family, and has the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse for friend. So I do not think that we shall have 'a sensation at Landernau.'"

* A trial for an offense of this kind in France is an action brought by a private person (*partie civile*) to recover damages, and at the same time a criminal prosecution conducted on behalf of the Government.—TR.

"How you go on, madame!" the president said sternly. "Can you suppose that the Court of First Instance will be influenced by considerations which have nothing to do with justice?"

"The event proves the contrary," she said meaningly, looking full at Sauvager and the president, who glanced coldly at her.

"Explain yourself, madame," said Sauvager. "You speak as if we had not done our duty."

"Madame Camusot meant nothing," interposed her husband.

"But has not Monsieur le Président just said something prejudicing a case which depends on the examination of the prisoner?" said she. "And the evidence is still to be taken, and the court has not given its decision?"

"We are not at the law-courts," the deputy public prosecutor replied tartly; "and beside, we know all that."

"But the public prosecutor knows nothing at all about it yet," returned she, with an ironical glance. "He will come back from the Chamber of Deputies in all haste. You have cut out his work for him, and he, no doubt, will speak for himself."

The deputy prosecutor knitted his thick bushy brows. Those interested read tardy scruples in his countenance. A great silence followed, broken by no sound but the dealing of the cards. M. and Mme. Camusot, sensible of a decided chill in the atmosphere, took their departure to leave the conspirators to talk at their ease.

"Camusot," the lady began in the street, "you went too far. Why lead those people to suspect that you will have no part in their schemes? They will play you some ugly trick."

"What can they do? I am the only examining magistrate."

"Cannot they slander you in whispers, and procure your dismissal?"

At that very moment Chesnel ran up against the couple. The old notary recognized the examining magistrate; and with the lucidity which comes of an experience of business, he saw that the fate of the d'Esgrignons lay in the hands of the young man before him.

"Ah, sir!" he exclaimed, "we shall soon need you badly. Just a word with you. Your pardon, madame," he added, as he drew Camusot aside.

Mme. Camusot, as a good conspirator, looked toward du Croisier's house, ready to break up the conversation if anybody appeared; but she thought, and thought rightly, that their enemies were busy discussing this unexpected turn which she had given to the affair. Chesnel meanwhile drew the magistrate into a dark corner under the wall, and lowered his voice for his companion's ear.

"If, sir, you are for the house d'Esgrignon," he said, "Madame la Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, the Prince de Cadignan, the Duc de Navarreins and de Lenoncourt, the keeper of the seals, the chancellor, the King himself, will interest themselves in you. I have just come from Paris; I knew all about this; I went post-haste to explain everything at Court. We are counting on you, and I will keep your secret. If you are hostile, I shall go back to Paris to-morrow and lodge a complaint with the keeper of the seals that there is a suspicion of corruption. Several functionaries were at du Croisier's house to-night, and, no doubt, ate and drank there, contrary to law; and beside, they are friends of his."

Chesnel would have brought the Almighty to intervene if he had had the power. He did not wait for an answer; he left Camusot and fled like a deer toward du Croisier's house. Camusot, meanwhile, bidden to reveal the notary's confidences, was at once assailed with: "Was I not right, dear?"—a wifely formula used on all occasions, but rather more vehemently when the fair speaker is in the wrong. By the time they reached home Camusot had admitted the superiority

of his partner in life, and appreciated his good fortune in belonging to her ; which confession, doubtless, was the prelude of a blissful night.

Chesnel met his foes in a body as they left du Croisier's house, and began to fear that du Croisier had gone to bed. In his position he was compelled to act quickly, and any delay was a misfortune.

"In the King's name !" he cried, as the manservant was closing the hall door. He had just brought the King on the scene for the benefit of an ambitious little official, and the word was still on his lips. He fretted and chafed while the door was unbarred ; then, swift as a thunderbolt, dashed into the antechamber, and spoke to the servant—

"A hundred crowns to you, young man, if you can wake Madame du Croisier and send her to me this instant. Tell her anything you like."

Chesnel grew cool and composed as he opened the door of the brightly lighted drawing-room, where du Croisier was striding up and down. For a moment the two men scanned each other, with hatred and enmity, twenty years' deep, in their eyes. One of the two had his foot on the heart of the house d'Esgrignon ; the other, with a lion's strength, came forward to pluck it away.

"Your humble servant, sir," said Chesnel. "Have you made the charge?"

"Yes, sir."

"When was it made?"

"Yesterday."

"Have any steps been taken since the warrant of arrest was issued?"

"I believe so."

"I have come to treat with you."

"Justice must take its course, nothing can stop it, the arrest has been made."

"Never mind that, I am at your orders, at your feet."

The old man knelt before du Croisier, and stretched out his hands entreatingly.

"What do you want? Our lands, our castle? Take all; withdraw the charge; leave us nothing but life and honor. And over and beside all this, I will be your servant; command, and I will obey."

Du Croisier sat down in an easy-chair and left the old man to kneel.

"You are not vindictive," pleaded Chesnel; "you are good-hearted, you do not bear us such a grudge that you will not listen to terms. Before daylight the young man ought to be at liberty."

"The whole town knows that he has been arrested," returned du Croisier, enjoying his revenge.

"It is a great misfortune; but as there will neither be proofs nor trial, we can easily manage that."

Du Croisier reflected. He seemed to be struggling with self-interest; Chesnel thought that he had gained a hold on his enemy through the great motive of human action. At that supreme moment Mme. du Croisier appeared.

"Come here and help me to soften your dear husband, madame," said Chesnel, still on his knees. Mme. du Croisier made him rise with every sign of profound astonishment. Chesnel explained his errand; and when she knew it, the generous daughter of the stewards of the Ducs d'Alençon turned to du Croisier with tears in her eyes.

"Ah! monsieur, can you hesitate? The d'Esgrignons, the honor of the province!" she said.

"There is more in it than that!" exclaimed du Croisier, rising to begin his restless walk again.

"More? What more?" asked Maître Chesnel in sheer amazement.

"France is involved, Monsieur Chesnel. It is a question of the country, of the people, of giving my lords your nobles a lesson, and teaching them that there is such a thing as jus-

tice, and law, and a bourgeoisie—a lesser nobility as good as they, and a match for them! There shall be no more trampling down half a score of wheat-fields for a single hare; no bringing shame on families by seducing unprotected girls; they shall not look down on others as good as they are, and mock at them for ten whole years, without finding out at last that these things swell into avalanches, and those avalanches will fall and crush and bury my lords the nobles. You want to go back to the old order of things. You want to tear up the social compact, the Charter, in which our rights are set forth——”

“And so?”

“Is it not a sacred mission to open the people’s eyes?” cried du Croisier. “Their eyes will be opened to the morality of your party when they see nobles going to be tried at the Assize Court like Pierre and Jacques. They will say, then, that small folk who keep their self-respect are as good as great folk that bring shame on themselves. The Assize Court is a light for all the world. Here, I am the champion of the people, the friend of law. You yourselves twice flung me on the side of the people—once when you refused an alliance, twice when you put me under the ban of your society. You are reaping as you have sown.”

If Chesnel was startled by this outburst, so no less was Mme. du Croisier. To her this was a terrible revelation of her husband’s character, a new light not merely on the past but on the future as well. Any capitulation on the part of the colossus was apparently out of the question; but Chesnel in nowise retreated before the impossible.

“What, monsieur?” said Mme. du Croisier. “Would you not forgive? Then you are not a Christian.”

“I forgive as God forgives, madame, on certain conditions.”

“And what are they?” asked Chesnel, thinking that he saw a ray of hope.

"The elections are coming on; I want the votes at your disposal."

"You shall have them."

"I wish that we, my wife and I, should be received familiarly every evening, with an appearance of friendliness at any rate, by Monsieur le Marquis d'Esgrignon and his circle," continued du Croisier.

"I do not know how we are going to compass it, but you shall be received."

"I wish to have the family bound over by a surety of four hundred thousand francs, and by a written document stating the nature of the compromise, so as to keep a loaded cannon pointed at its heart."

"We agree," said Chesnel, without admitting that the three hundred thousand francs was in his possession; "but the amount must be deposited with a third party and returned to the family after your election and repayment."

"No; after the marriage of my grand-niece, Mademoiselle Duval. She will very likely have four million francs some day; the reversion of our property (mine and my wife's) shall be settled upon her by her marriage-contract, and you shall arrange a match between her and the young count."

"Never!"

"*Never!*" repeated du Croisier, quite intoxicated with triumph. "Good-night!"

"Idiot that I am," thought Chesnel, "why did I shrink from a lie to such a man?"

Du Croisier took himself off; he was pleased with himself; he had enjoyed Chesnel's humiliation; he had held the destinies of a proud house, the representative of the aristocracy of the province, suspended in his hand; he had set the print of his heel on the very heart of the d'Esgrignons; and, finally, he had broken off the whole negotiation on the score of his wounded pride. He went up to his room, leaving his wife alone with Chesnel. In his intoxication, he saw his victory

clear before him. He firmly believed that the three hundred thousand francs had been squandered ; the d'Esgrignons must sell or mortgage all that they had to raise the money ; the Assize Court was inevitable to his mind.

An affair of forgery can always be settled out of court in France if the missing amount is returned. The losers by the crime are usually well-to-do, and have no wish to blight an imprudent man's character. But du Croisier had no mind to slacken his hold until he knew what he was about. He meditated until he fell asleep on the magnificent manner in which his hopes would be fulfilled by way of the Assize Court or by marriage. The murmur of voices below, the lamentations of Chesnel and Mme. du Croisier, sounded sweet in his ears.

Mme. du Croisier shared Chesnel's views of the d'Esgrignons. She was a deeply religious woman, a Royalist attached to the noblesse ; the interview had been in every way a cruel shock to her feelings. She, a stanch Royalist, had heard the roaring of that Liberalism which, in her director's opinion, wished to crush the church. The Left benches for her meant the popular upheaval and the scaffolds of 1793.

"What would your uncle, that sainted man who hears us, say to this?" exclaimed Chesnel. Mme. du Croisier made no reply, but the great tears rolled down her cheeks.

"You have already been the cause of one poor boy's death ; his mother will go mourning all her days," continued Chesnel (he saw how his words told, but he would have struck harder and even broken this woman's heart to save Victurnien). "Do you want to kill Mademoiselle Armande, for she would not survive the dishonor of the house for a week ? Do you wish to be the death of poor Chesnel, your old notary ? For I shall kill the count in prison before they shall bring the charge against him, and take my own life afterward, before they shall try me for murder in an Assize Court."

"That is enough ! that is enough, my friend ? I would do

anything to put a stop to such an affair ; but I never knew Monsieur du Croisier's real character until a few minutes ago. To you I can make the admission : there is nothing to be done."

"But what if there is?"

"I would give half the blood in my veins that it were so," said she, finishing her sentence by a wistful shake of the head.

As the First Consul, beaten on the field of Marengo till five o'clock in the evening, by six o'clock saw the tide of battle turned by Desaix's desperate attack and Kellermann's terrific charge, so Chesnel in the midst of defeat saw the beginnings of victory. No one but a Chesnel, an old notary, an ex-steward of the manor, old Maître Sorbier's junior clerk, in the sudden flash of lucidity which comes with despair, could rise thus, high as a Napoleon ; nay, higher. This was not Marengo, it was Waterloo, and the Prussians had come up ; Chesnel saw this, and was determined to beat them off the field.

"Madame," he said, "remember that I have been your man of business for twenty years ; remember that if the d'Esgrignons mean the honor of the province, you represent the honor of the bourgeoisie ; it rests with you, and you alone, to save the ancient house. Now, answer me ; are you going to allow dishonor to fall on the shade of your dead uncle, on the d'Esgrignons, on poor Chesnel ? Do you want to kill Mademoiselle Armande weeping yonder ? Or do you wish to expiate wrongs done to others by a deed which will rejoice your ancestors, the stewards of the dukes of Alençon, and bring comfort to the soul of our dear abbé. If he could rise from his grave, he would command you to do this thing that I beg of you upon my knees."

"What is it ?" asked Mme. du Croisier.

"Well. Here are the hundred thousand crowns," said Chesnel, drawing the bundles of notes from his pocket. "Take them, and there will be an end of it."

"If that is all," she began, "and if no harm can come of it to my husband——"

"Nothing but good," Chesnel replied. "You are saving him from eternal punishment in hell, at the cost of a slight disappointment here below."

"He will not be compromised, will he?" she asked, looking into Chesnel's face.

Then Chesnel read the depths of the poor wife's mind. Mme. du Croisier was hesitating between her two creeds; between wifely obedience to her husband as laid down by the church, and obedience to the altar and the throne. Her husband, in her eyes, was acting wrongly, but she dared not blame him; she would fain save the d'Esgrignons, but she was loyal to her husband's interests.

"Not in the least," Chesnel answered; "your old notary swears it by the Holy Gospels——"

He had nothing left to lose for the d'Esgrignons but his soul; he risked it now by this horrible perjury, but Mme. du Croisier must be deceived, there was no other choice but death. Without losing a moment, he dictated a form of receipt by which Mme. du Croisier acknowledged payment of a hundred thousand crowns five days before the fatal letter of exchange appeared; for he recollected that du Croisier was away from home, superintending improvements on his wife's property at the time.

"Now swear to me that you will declare before the examining magistrate that you received the money on that date," he said, when Mme. du Croisier had taken the notes and he held the receipt in his hand.

"It will be a lie, will it not?"

"Venial sin," said Chesnel.

"I could not do it without consulting my director, Monsieur l'Abbé Couturier."

"Very well," said Chesnel, "will you be guided entirely by his advice in this affair?"

"I promise that."

"And you must not give the money to Monsieur du Croisier until you have been before the magistrate."

"No. Ah! God give me strength to appear in a court of justice and maintain a lie before men!"

Chesnel kissed Mme. du Croisier's hand, then stood upright and majestic as one of the prophets that Raphael painted in the Vatican.

"Your uncle's soul is thrilled with joy," he said; "you have wiped out for ever the wrong that you did by marrying an enemy of altar and throne"—words that made a lively impression on Mme. du Croisier's timorous mind.

Then Chesnel all at once bethought himself that he must make sure of the lady's director, the Abbé du Couturier. He knew how obstinately devout souls can work for the triumph of their views when once they come forward for their side, and wished to secure the concurrence of the church as early as possible. So he went to the Hôtel d'Esgrignon, roused up Mlle. Armande, gave her an account of that night's work, and sped her to fetch the bishop himself into the forefront of the battle.

"Ah, God in heaven! Thou must save the house d'Esgrignon!" he exclaimed, as he went slowly home again. "The affair is developing now into a fight in a court of law. We are face to face with men that have passions and interests of their own; we cannot get anything out of them. This du Croisier has taken advantage of the public prosecutor's absence; the public prosecutor is devoted to us, but since the opening of the Chambers he has gone to Paris. Now, what can they have done to get round his deputy? They have induced him to take up the charge without consulting his chief. This mystery must be looked into, and the ground surveyed to-morrow; and then, perhaps, when I have unraveled this web of theirs, I will go back to Paris to set great powers at work through Madame de Maufrigneuse."

So he reasoned, poor, aged, clear-sighted wrestler, before he lay down half dead with bearing the weight of so much emotion and fatigue. And yet, before he fell asleep, he ran a searching eye over the list of magistrates, taking all their secret ambitions into account, casting about for ways of influencing them, calculating his chances in the coming struggle. Chesnel's prolonged scrutiny of consciences, given in a condensed form, will perhaps serve as a picture of the judicial world in a country town.

Magistrates and officials generally are obliged to begin their career in the provinces; judicial ambition there ferments. At the outset every man looks toward Paris; they all aspire to shine in the vast theatre where great political causes come before the courts, and the higher branches of the legal profession are closely connected with the palpitating interests of society.

At this time the younger men were full of Royalist zeal against the enemies of the Bourbons. The most insignificant deputy official was dreaming of conducting a prosecution, and praying with all his might for one of those political cases which bring a man's zeal into prominence, draw the attention of the higher powers, and mean advancement for King's men. Was there a member of any official staff of prosecuting counsel who could hear of a Bonapartist conspiracy breaking out somewhere else without a feeling of envy? Where was the man that did not burn to discover a Caron, or a Berton, or a revolt of some sort? With reasons of State, and the necessity of diffusing the monarchical spirit throughout France as their basis, and a fierce ambition stirred up whenever party spirit ran high, these ardent politicians on their promotion were lucid, clear-sighted, and perspicacious. They kept up a vigorous detective system throughout the kingdom; they did the work of spies, and urged the nation along a pathway of obedience, from which it had no business to swerve.

Justice, thus informed with monarchical enthusiasm, atoned

for the errors of the ancient parliaments, and walked, perhaps, too ostentatiously hand in hand with religion. There was more zeal than discretion shown; but justice sinned not so much in the direction of Machiavellism as by giving too candid expression to its views, when those views appeared to be opposed to the general interests of a country which must be put safely out of reach of revolutions.

Officials of both complexions were to be found in the court in which young d'Esgrignon's fate depended. M. le Président du Ronceret and an elderly judge, Blondet by name, represented the section of functionaries shelved for good, and resigned to stay where they were; while the young and ambitious party comprised the examining magistrate, M. Camusot, and his deputy, M. Michu, appointed through the interest of the Cinq-Cygnés, and certain of promotion to the Court of Appeals of Paris at the first opportunity.

President du Ronceret held a permanent post; it was impossible to turn him out. The aristocratic party declined to give him what he considered to be his due, socially speaking; so he declared for the bourgeoisie, glossed over his disappointment with the name of independence, and failed to realize that his opinions condemned him to remain a president of a court of first instance for the rest of his life. Once started on this track, the sequence of events led du Ronceret to place his hopes of advancement on the triumph of du Croisier and the Left. He was in no better odor at the prefecture than at the Court-Royal. He was compelled to keep on good terms with the authorities; the Liberals distrusted him, consequently he belonged to neither party. He was obliged to resign his chances of election to du Croisier, he exercised no influence, and played a secondary part. The false position reacted on his character; he was soured and discontented; he was tired of political ambiguity, and privately had made up his mind to come forward openly as leader of the Liberal party, and so to strike ahead of du Croisier. His behavior in the d'Esgrignon

affair was the first step in this direction. To begin with, he was an admirable representative of that section of the middle-classes which allows its petty passions to obscure the wider interests of the country; a class of crotchety politicians, upholding the government one day and opposing it the next, compromising every cause and helping none; helpless after they have done the mischief till they set about brewing more; unwilling to face their own incompetence, thwarting authority while professing to serve it. With a compound of arrogance and humility they demand of the people more submission than kings expect, and fret their souls because those above them are not brought down to their level, as if greatness could be little, as if power existed without force.

President du Ronceret was a tall, spare man with a receding forehead and scanty, auburn hair. He was wall-eyed, his complexion was blotched, his lips thin and hard, his scarcely audible voice came out like the husky wheezings of asthma. He had for a wife a great, solemn, clumsy creature, tricked out in the most ridiculous fashion, and outrageously over-dressed. Mme. la Présidente gave herself the airs of a queen; she wore vivid colors, and always appeared at balls adorned with the turban, dear to the British female, and lovingly cultivated in out-of-the-way districts in France. Each of the pair had an income of four or five thousand francs, which, with the president's salary, reached a total of some twelve thousand. In spite of a decided tendency to parsimony, vanity required that they should receive one evening in the week. Du Croisier might import modern luxury into the town, M. and Mme. du Ronceret were faithful to the old traditions. They had always lived in the old-fashioned house belonging to Mme. du Ronceret, and had made no changes in it since their marriage. The house stood between a garden and a courtyard. The gray old gable end, with one window in each story, gave upon the road. High walls inclosed the garden and the yard, but the space taken up beneath them in

the garden by a walk shaded with chestnut trees was filled in the yard by a row of outbuildings. An old rust-devoured iron gate in the garden wall balanced the yard gateway, a huge, double-leaved carriage entrance with a buttress on either side, and a mighty shell on the top. The same shell was repeated over the house-door.

The whole place was gloomy, close, and airless. The row of iron-grated openings in the opposite wall, as you entered, reminded you of prison windows. Every passer-by could look in through the railings to see how the garden grew; the flowers in the little square borders never seemed to thrive there.

The drawing-room on the first floor was lighted by a single window on the side of the street and a French window above a flight of steps, which gave upon the garden. The dining-room on the other side of the great antechamber, with its windows also looking out into the garden, was exactly the same size as the drawing-room, and all three apartments were in harmony with the general air of gloom. It wearied your eyes to look at the ceilings all divided up by huge painted cross-beams and adorned with a feeble lozenge pattern or a rosette in the middle. The paint was old, startling in tint, and begrimed with smoke. The sun had faded the heavy silk curtains in the drawing-room; the old-fashioned Beauvais tapestry which covered the white-painted furniture had lost all its color with wear. A Louis Quinze clock on the mantel stood between two extravagant, branched sconces filled with yellow wax candles, which the presidente only lighted on occasions when the old-fashioned rock-crystal chandelier emerged from its green wrapper. Three card-tables, covered with threadbare baize, and a backgammon box, sufficed for the recreations of the company; and Mme. du Ronceret treated them to such refreshments as cider, chestnuts, pastry puffs, glasses of *eau sucrée*, and home-made orangeade. For some time past she had made a practice of

giving a party once a fortnight, when tea and some pitiable attempts at pastry appeared to grace the occasion.

Once a quarter the du Roncerets gave a grand three-course dinner, which made a great sensation in the town, a dinner served up on execrable ware, but prepared with the science for which the provincial cook is remarkable. It was a Gargantuan repast, which lasted for six whole hours, and by abundance the president tried to vie with du Croisier's elegance.

And so du Ronceret's life and its accessories were just what might have been expected from his character and his false position. He felt dissatisfied at home without precisely knowing what was the matter; but he dared not go to any expense to change existing conditions, and was only too glad to put by seven or eight thousand francs every year, so as to leave his son Fabien a handsome private fortune. Fabien du Ronceret had no mind for the magistracy, the bar, or the civil service, and his pronounced turn for doing nothing drove his parent to despair.

On this head there was rivalry between the president and the vice-president, old M. Blondet. M. Blondet, for a long time past, had been sedulously cultivating an acquaintance between his son and the Blandureau family. The Blandureaus were well-to-do linen manufacturers, with an only daughter, and it was on this daughter that the president had fixed his choice of a wife for Fabien. Now, Joseph Blondet's marriage with Mlle. Blandureau depended on his nomination to the post which his father, old Blondet, hoped to obtain for him when he himself should retire. But President du Ronceret, in underhand ways, was thwarting the old man's plans, and working indirectly upon the Blandureaus. Indeed, if it had not been for this affair of young d'Esgrignon's, the astute president might have cut them out, father and son, for their rivals were very much richer.

Before the Revolution broke out, Blondet senior had been a barrister; afterward he became the public accuser, and one

of the mildest of those formidable functionaries. Goodman Blondet, as they used to call him, deadened the force of the new doctrines by acquiescing in them all, and putting none of them in practice. He had been obliged to send one or two nobles to prison ; but his further proceedings were marked with such deliberation, that he brought them through to the 9th Thermidor with a dexterity which won respect for him on all sides. As a matter of fact, Goodman Blondet ought to have been president of the Tribunal, but when the courts of law were reorganized he had been set aside ; Napoleon's aversion from Republicans was apt to reappear in the smallest appointments under his government. The qualification of ex-public accuser, written in the margin of the list against Blondet's name, set the Emperor inquiring of Cambacérès whether there might not be some scion of an ancient parliamentary stock to appoint instead. The consequence was that du Ronceret, whose father had been a councilor of parliament, was nominated to the presidency ; but, the Emperor's repugnance notwithstanding, Cambacérès allowed Blondet to remain on the bench, saying that the old barrister was one of the best juri-consuls in France.

Blondet's talents, his knowledge of the old law of the land and subsequent legislation, should by rights have brought him far in his profession ; but he had this much in common with some few great spirits : he entertained a prodigious contempt for his own special knowledge, and reserved all his pretensions, leisure, and capacity for a second pursuit unconnected with the law. To this pursuit he gave his almost exclusive attention. The good man was passionately fond of gardening. He was in correspondence with some of the most celebrated amateurs ; it was his ambition to create new species ; he took an interest in botanical discoveries, and lived, in short, in the world of flowers. Like all florists, he had a predilection for one particular plant ; the *pelargonium* was his especial favorite. The court, the cases that came before it,

and his outward life were as nothing to him compared with the inward life of fancies and abundant emotions which the old man led. He fell more and more in love with his flower-seraglio; and the pains which he bestowed on his garden, the sweet round of the labors of the months, held Goodman Blondet fast in his greenhouse. But for that hobby he would have been a deputy under the Empire, and shone conspicuous beyond a doubt in the Corps Legislatif.

His marriage was the second cause of his obscurity. As a man of forty, he was rash enough to marry a girl of eighteen, by whom he had a son named Joseph in the first year of their marriage. Three years afterward Mme. Blondet, then the prettiest woman in the town, inspired in the prefect of the department a passion which ended only with her death. The prefect was the father of her second son, Émile; the whole town knew this, old Blondet himself knew it. The wife who might have roused her husband's ambition, who might have won him away from his flowers, positively encouraged the judge in his botanical tastes. She no more cared to leave the place than the prefect cared to leave his prefecture so long as his mistress lived.

Blondet felt himself unequal at his age to a contest with a young wife. He sought consolation in his greenhouse, and engaged a very pretty servant-maid to assist him to tend his ever-changing bevy of beauties. So while the judge potted, pricked out, watered, layered, slipped, blended, and induced his flowers to break, Mme. Blondet spent his substance on the dress and finery in which she shone at the prefecture. One interest alone had power to draw her away from the tender care of a romantic affection which the town came to admire in the end; and this interest was Émile's education. The child of love was a bright and pretty boy, while Joseph was no less heavy and plain-featured. The old judge, blinded by paternal affection, loved Joseph as his wife loved Émile.

For a dozen years M. Blondet bore his lot with perfect

resignation. He shut his eyes to his wife's intrigue with a dignified, well-bred composure, quite in the style of an eighteenth-century great lord; but, like all men with a taste for a quiet life, he could cherish a profound dislike, and he hated the younger son. When his wife died, therefore, in 1818, he turned the intruder out of the house, and packed him off to Paris to study law on an allowance of twelve hundred francs for all resource, nor could any cry of distress extract another penny from his purse. Émile Blondet would have gone under if it had not been for his real father.

M. Blondet's house was one of the prettiest in the town. It stood almost opposite the prefecture, with a neat little court in front. A row of old-fashioned iron railings between two brickwork piers inclosed it from the street; and a low wall, also of brick, with a second row of railings along the top, connected the piers with the neighboring house. The little court, a space about sixty feet in width by one hundred and twenty in length, was cut in two by a brick pathway which ran from the gate to the house door between a border on either side. Those borders were always renewed; at every season of the year they exhibited a successful show of blossom, to the admiration of the public. All along the back of the garden-beds a quantity of climbing plants grew up and covered the walls of the neighboring houses with a magnificent mantle; the brickwork piers were hidden in clusters of honeysuckle; and, to crown all, in a couple of terra-cotta vases at the summit, a pair of acclimatized cacti displayed to the astonished eyes of the ignorant those thick leaves bristling with spiny defenses which seem to be due to some plant disease.

It was a plain-looking house, built of brick, with brickwork arches above the windows, and bright green Venetian blinds to make it gay. Through the glass door you could look straight across the house to the opposite glass door, at the end of a long passage, and down the central alley in the garden beyond; while through the windows of the dining-room and

drawing-room, which extended, like the hall, from back to front of the house, you could often catch further glimpses of the flower-beds in a garden of about two acres in extent. Seen from the road, the brickwork harmonized with the fresh flowers and shrubs, for two centuries had overlaid it with mosses, and green and russet tints. No one could pass through the town without falling in love with a house with such charming surroundings, so covered with flowers and mosses to the roof-ridge, where two pigeons of glazed crockery-ware were perched by way of ornament.

M. Blondet possessed an income of about four thousand livres derived from land, beside the old house in the town. He meant to avenge his wrongs legitimately enough. He would leave his house, his lands, his seat on the bench to his son Joseph, and the whole town knew what he meant to do. He had made a will in that son's favor; he had gone as far as the Code will permit a man to go in the way of disinheriting one child to benefit another; and what was more, he had been putting by money for the past fifteen years to enable his lout of a son to buy back from Émile that portion of his father's estate which could not legally be taken away from him.

Émile Blondet, thus turned adrift, had contrived to gain distinction in Paris, but so far it was rather a name than a practical result. Émile's indolence, recklessness, and happy-go-lucky ways drove his real father to despair; and when that father died, a half-ruined man, turned out of office by one of the political reactions so frequent under the Restoration, it was with a mind uneasy as to the future of a man endowed with the most brilliant qualities.

Émile Blondet found support in a friendship with a Mlle. de Troisville, whom he had known before her marriage with the Comte de Montcornet. His mother was living when the Troisvilles came back after the emigration; she was related to the family, distantly it is true, but the connection was close enough to allow her to introduce Émile to the house. She,

poor woman, foresaw the future. She knew that when she died her son would lose both mother and father, a thought which made death doubly bitter, so she tried to interest others in him. She encouraged the liking that sprang up between Émile and the eldest daughter of the house of Troisville ; but while the liking was exceedingly strong on the young lady's part, a marriage was out of the question. It was a romance on the pattern of "Paul and Virginia." Mme. Blondet did what she could to teach her son to look to the Troisvilles, to found a lasting attachment on a children's game of "make-believe" love, which was bound to end as boy-and-girl romances usually do. When Mlle. de Troisville's marriage with General Montcornet was announced, Mme. Blondet, a dying woman, went to the bride and solemnly implored her never to abandon Émile, and to use her influence for him in society in Paris, whither the general's fortune summoned her to shine.

Luckily for Émile, he was able to make his own way. He made his appearance, at the age of twenty, as one of the masters of modern literature ; and met with no less success in the society into which he was launched by the father who at first could afford to bear the expense of the young man's extravagance. Perhaps Émile's precocious celebrity and the good figure that he made strengthened the bonds of his friendship with the countess. Perhaps Mme. de Montcornet, with the Russian blood in her veins (her mother was the daughter of the Princess Scherbelloff), might have cast off the friend of her childhood if he had been a poor man struggling with all his might among the difficulties which beset a man of letters in Paris ; but by the time that the real strain of Émile's adventurous life began, their attachment was unalterable on either side. He was looked upon as one of the leading lights of journalism when young d'Esgrignon met him at his first supper-party in Paris ; his acknowledged position in the world of letters was very high, and he towered above his reputation.

Goodman Blondet had not the faintest conception of the power which the Constitutional Government had given to the press; nobody ventured to talk in his presence of the son of whom he refused to hear. And so it came to pass that he knew nothing of Émile whom he had cursed and Émile's greatness.

Old Blondet's integrity was as deeply rooted in him as his passion for flowers; he knew nothing but law and botany. He would have interviews with litigants, listen to them, chat with them, and show them his flowers; he would accept rare seeds from them; but once on the bench, no judge on earth was more impartial. Indeed, his manner of proceeding was so well known that litigants never went near him except to hand over some document which might enlighten him in the performance of his duty, and nobody tried to throw dust in his eyes. With his learning, his lights, and his way of holding his real talents cheap, he was so indispensable to President du Ronceret, that, matrimonial schemes apart, that functionary would have done all that he could, in an underhand way, to prevent the vice-president from retiring in favor of his son. If the learned old man left the bench, the president would be utterly unable to do without him.

Goodman Blondet did not know that it was in Émile's power to fulfill all his wishes in a few hours. The simplicity of his life was worthy of one of Plutarch's men. In the evening he looked over his cases; next morning he worked among his flowers; and all day long he gave decisions on the bench. The pretty maid-servant, now of ripe age and wrinkled like an Easter pippin, looked after the house, and they lived according to the established customs of the strictest parsimony. Mlle. Cadot always carried the keys of her cupboards and fruit-loft about with her. She was indefatigable. She went to market herself, she cooked and dusted and swept, and never missed mass of a morning. To give some idea of the domestic life of the household, it will be enough to remark

that the father and son never ate fruit till it was beginning to spoil, because Mlle. Cadot always brought out anything that would not keep. No one in the house ever tasted the luxury of new bread, and all the fast days in the kalendar were punctually observed. The gardener was put on rations like a soldier; the elderly Valideh always kept an eye upon him. And she, for her part, was so deferentially treated, that she took her meals with the family, and in consequence was continually trotting to and fro between the kitchen and the parlor at breakfast and dinner time.

Mlle. Blandureau's parents had consented to her marriage with Joseph Blondet upon one condition—the penniless and briefless barrister must be an assistant judge. So, with the desire of fitting his son to fill the position, old M. Blondet racked his brains to hammer the law into his son's head by dint of lessons, so as to make a cut-and-dried lawyer of him. As for Blondet junior, he spent almost every evening at the Blandureaus' house, to which also young Fabien du Ronceret had been admitted since his return, without raising the slightest suspicion in the minds of father or son.

Everything in this life of theirs was measured by an accuracy worthy of Gerard Dow's "Money Changer;" not a grain of salt too much, not a single profit foregone; but the economical principles by which it was regulated were relaxed in favor of the greenhouse and garden. "The garden was the master's craze," Mlle. Cadot used to say. The master's blind fondness for Joseph was not a craze in her eyes; she shared the father's predilection; she pampered Joseph; she darned his stockings; and would have been better pleased if the money spent on the garden had been put by for Joseph's benefit.

That garden was kept in marvelous order by a single man; the paths, covered with river-sand, continually turned over with the rake, meandered among the borders full of the rarest flowers. Here were all kinds of color and scent, here were lizards on the walls, legions of little flower-pots standing out

in the sun, regiments of forks and hoes, and a host of innocent things, a combination of pleasant results to justify the gardener's charming hobby.

At the end of the greenhouse the judge had set up a grand stand, an amphitheatre of benches to hold some five or six thousand pelargoniums in pots—a splendid and famous show. People came to see his geraniums in flower, not only from the neighborhood, but even from the departments round about. The Empress Marie Louise, passing through the town, had honored the curiously kept greenhouse with a visit; so much was she impressed with the sight that she spoke of it to Napoleon, and the old judge received the cross of the Legion of Honor. But as the learned gardener never mingled in society at all, and went nowhere except to the Blandureaus, he had no suspicion of the president's underhand manœuvres; and others who could see the president's intentions were far too much afraid of him to interfere or to warn the inoffensive Blondets.

As for Michu, that young man with his powerful connections gave much more thought to making himself agreeable to the women in the upper social circles to which he was introduced by the Cinq-Cygnés, than to the extremely simple business of a provincial Tribunal. With his independent means (he had an income of twelve thousand livres), he was courted by mothers of daughters, and led a frivolous life. He did just enough at the Tribunal to satisfy his conscience, much as a schoolboy does his exercises, saying ditto on all occasions, with a "Yes, dear president." But underneath the appearance of indifference lurked the unusual powers of the Paris law student who had distinguished himself as one of the staff of prosecuting counsel before he came to the provinces. He was accustomed to taking broad views of things; he could do rapidly what the president and Blondet could only do after much thinking, and very often solved knotty points for them. In delicate conjunctures the president and vice-president took

counsel with their junior, confided thorny questions to him, and never failed to wonder at the readiness with which he brought back a task in which old Blondet found nothing to criticise. Michu was sure of the influence of the most crabbed aristocrats, and he was young and rich; he lived, therefore, above the level of departmental intrigues and pettinesses. He was an indispensable man at picnics, he frisked with young ladies and paid court to their mothers, he danced at balls, he gambled like a capitalist. In short, he played his part of young lawyer of fashion to admiration; without, at the same time, compromising his dignity, which he knew how to assert at the right moment like a man of spirit. He won golden opinions by the manner in which he threw himself into provincial ways, without criticising them; and for these reasons, every one endeavored to make his time of exile endurable.

The public prosecutor was a lawyer of the highest ability; he had taken the plunge into political life, and was one of the most distinguished speakers on the ministerialist benches. The president stood in awe of him; if he had not been away in Paris at the time, no steps would have been taken against Victurnien; his dexterity, his experience of business, would have prevented the whole affair. At that moment, however, he was in the Chamber of Deputies, and the president and du Croisier had taken advantage of his absence to weave their plot, calculating, with a certain ingenuity, that if once the law stepped in, and the matter was noised abroad, things would have gone too far to be remedied.

As a matter of fact, no staff of prosecuting counsel in any Tribunal, at that particular time, would have taken up a charge of forgery against the eldest son of one of the noblest houses in France without going into the case at great length, and a special reference, in all probability, to the attorney-general. In such a case as this, the authorities and the Government would have tried endless ways of compromising and hushing up an affair which might send an imprudent

young man to the hulks. They would very likely have done the same for a Liberal family in a prominent position, so long as the Liberals were not too openly hostile to the throne and the altar. So du Croisier's charge and the young count's arrest had not been very easy to manage. The president and du Croisier had compassed their ends in the following manner:

M. Sauvager, a young Royalist barrister, had reached the position of deputy public prosecutor by dint of subservience to the Ministry. In the absence of his chief he was head of the staff of counsel for prosecution, and, consequently, it fell to him to take up the charge made by du Croisier. Sauvager was a self-made man; he had nothing but his stipend; and for that reason the authorities reckoned upon some one who had everything to gain by devotion. The president now exploited the position. No sooner was the document with the alleged forgery in du Croisier's hands, than Mme. la Présidente du Ronceret, prompted by her spouse, had a long conversation with M. Sauvager. In the course of it she pointed out the uncertainties of a career in the *magistrature debout* compared with the *magistrature assise*, and the advantages of the bench over the bar; she showed how a freak on the part of some official, or a single false step, might ruin a man's career.

"If you are conscientious and give your conclusions against the powers that be, you are lost," continued she. "Now, at this moment, you might turn your position to account to make a fine match that would put you above unlucky chances for the rest of your life; you may marry a wife with fortune sufficient to land you on the bench, in the *magistrature assise*. There is a fine chance for you. Monsieur du Croisier will never have any children; everybody knows why. His money, and his wife's as well, will go to his niece, Mademoiselle Duval. Monsieur Duval is an iron-master, his purse is tolerably filled, to begin with, and his father is still alive, and has a little property beside. The

father and son have a million of francs between them ; they will double it with du Croisier's help, for du Croisier has business connections among great capitalists and manufacturers in Paris. Monsieur and Madame Duval the younger would be certain to give their daughter to a suitor brought forward by du Croisier, for he is sure to leave two fortunes to his niece ; and, in all probability, he will settle the reversion of his wife's property upon Mademoiselle Duval in the marriage-contract, for Madame du Croisier has no kin. You know how du Croisier hates the d'Esgrignons. Do him a service, be his man, take up this charge of forgery which he is going to make against young d'Esgrignon, and follow up the proceedings at once without consulting the public prosecutor at Paris. And, then, pray heaven that the Ministry dismisses you for doing your office impartially, in spite of the powers that be ; for if they do, your fortune is made ! You will have a charming wife and thirty thousand francs a year with her, to say nothing of four millions of expectations in ten years' time."

In two evenings Sauvager was talked over. Both he and the president kept the affair a secret from old Blondet, from Michu, and from the second member of the staff of prosecuting counsel. Feeling sure of Blondet's impartiality on a question of fact, the president made certain of a majority without counting Camusot. And now Camusot's unexpected defection had thrown everything out. What the president wanted was a committal for trial before the public prosecutor got warning. How if Camusot or the second counsel for the prosecution should send word to Paris ?

And here some portion of Camusot's private history may perhaps explain how it came to pass that Chesnel took it for granted that the examining magistrate would be on the d'Esgrignons' side, and how he had the boldness to tamper in the open street with that representative of justice.

Camusot's father, a well-known silk mercer in the Rue des

Bourdonnais, was ambitious for the only son of his first marriage, and brought him up to the law. When Camusot junior took a wife, he gained with her the influence of an usher of the royal cabinet, back-stairs influence, it is true, but still sufficient, since it had brought him his first appointment as justice of the peace, and the second as examining magistrate. At the time of his marriage, his father only settled an income of six thousand francs upon him (the amount of his mother's fortune, which he could legally claim), and as Mlle. Thirion brought him no more than twenty thousand francs as her portion, the young couple knew the hardships of hidden poverty. The salary of a provincial justice of the peace does not exceed fifteen hundred francs, while an examining magistrate's stipend is augmented by something like a thousand francs, because his position entails expenses and extra work. The post, therefore, is much coveted, though it is not permanent, and the work is heavy, and that was why Mme. Camusot had just scolded her husband for allowing the president to read his thoughts.

Marie-Cécile-Amélie Thirion, after three years of marriage, perceived the blessing of heaven upon it in the regularity of two auspicious events—the births of a girl and a boy; but she prayed to be less blessed in future. A few more of such blessings would turn straitened means into distress. M. Camusot's father's money was not likely to come to them for a long time; and, rich as he was, he would scarcely leave more than eight or ten thousand francs a year to each of his children, four in number, for he had been married twice. And beside, by the time that all "expectations," as matchmakers call them, were realized, would not the magistrate have children of his own to settle in life? Any one can imagine the situation for a little woman with plenty of sense and determination, and Mme. Camusot was such a woman. She did not refrain from meddling in matters judicial. She had far too strong a sense of the gravity of a false step in her husband's career.

She was the only child of an old servant of Louis XVIII., a valet who had followed his master in his wanderings in Italy, Courland, and England, till after the Restoration the King rewarded him with the one place that he could fill at Court, and made him usher by rotation to the royal cabinet. So in Amélie's home there had been, as it were, a sort of reflection of the Court. Thirion used to tell her about the lords, and ministers, and great men whom he announced and introduced and saw passing to and fro. The girl, brought up at the gates of the Tuileries, had caught some tincture of the maxims practiced there, and adopted the dogma of passive obedience to authority. She had sagely judged that her husband, by ranging himself on the side of the d'Esgrignons, would find favor with Mme. la Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, and with two powerful families on whose influence with the King the Sieur Thirion could depend at an opportune moment. Camusot might get an appointment at the first opportunity within the jurisdiction of Paris, and afterward at Paris itself. That promotion, dreamed of and longed for at every moment, was certain to have a salary of six thousand francs attached to it, as well as the alleviation of living in her own father's house, or under the Camusots' roof, and all the advantages of a father's fortune on either side. If the adage: "Out of sight is out of mind," holds good of most women, it is particularly true where family feeling or royal or ministerial patronage is concerned. The personal attendants of kings prosper at all times; you take an interest in a man, be it only a man in livery, if you see him every day.

Mme. Camusot, regarding herself as a bird of passage, had taken a little house in the Rue du Cygne. Furnished lodgings there were none; the town was not enough of a thoroughfare, and the Camusots could not afford to live at an inn, like M. Michu. So the fair Parisian had no choice for it but to take such furniture as she could find; and as she paid a very moderate rent, the house was remarkably ugly, albeit a certain

quaintness of detail was not wanting. It was built against a neighboring house in such a fashion that the side, with only one window in each story, gave upon the street, and the front looked out upon a yard where rose-bushes and buckthorn were growing along the wall on either side. On the farther side, opposite the house, stood a shed, a roof over two brick arches. A little wicket-gate gave entrance into the gloomy place (made gloomier still by the great walnut tree which grew in the yard), and a double flight of steps, with an elaborately wrought but rust-eaten handrail, led to the house-door. Inside the house there were two rooms on each floor. The dining-room occupied that part of the first floor nearest the street, and the kitchen lay on the other side of a narrow passage almost wholly taken up by the wooden staircase. Of the two second-floor rooms, one did duty as the magistrate's study, the other as a bedroom, while the nursery and the servants' bedroom stood above in the attics. There were no ceilings in the house; the cross-beams were simply white-washed and the spaces plastered over. Both rooms on the second floor and the dining-room below were wainscoted and adorned with the labyrinthine designs which taxed the patience of the eighteenth-century carpenter; but the carving had been painted a dingy gray most depressing to behold.

The magistrate's study looked as though it belonged to a provincial lawyer; it contained a big desk, a mahogany arm-chair, a law student's books, and shabby belongings transported from Paris. Mme. Camusot's room was more of a native product; it boasted a blue-and-white scheme of decoration, a carpet, and that anomalous kind of furniture which appears to be in the fashion, while it is simply some style that has failed in Paris. As to the dining-room, it was nothing but an ordinary provincial dining-room, bare and chilly, with a damp, faded paper on the walls.

In this shabby room, with nothing to see but the walnut tree, the dark leaves growing against the walls, and the almost

deserted road beyond them, a somewhat lively and frivolous woman, accustomed to the amusements and stir of Paris, used to sit all day long, day after day, and for the most part of the time alone, though she received tiresome and inane visits which led her to think her loneliness preferable to empty tittle-tattle. If she permitted herself the slightest gleam of intelligence, it gave rise to interminable comment and embittered her condition. She occupied herself a good deal with her children, not so much from taste as for the sake of an interest in her almost solitary life, and exercised her mind on the only subjects which she could find ; to wit, the intrigues which went on around her, the ways of provincials, and the ambitions shut in by their narrow horizons. So she very soon fathomed mysteries of which her husband had no idea. As she sat at her window with a piece of intermittent embroidery work in her fingers, she did not see her wood-shed full of faggots nor the servant busy at the wash-tub ; she was looking out upon Paris, Paris where everything is pleasure, everything is full of life. She dreamed of Paris gayeties, and shed tears because she must abide in this dull prison of a country town. She was disconsolate because she lived in a peaceful district, where no conspiracy, no great affair would ever occur. She saw herself doomed to sit under the shadow of the walnut tree for some time to come.

Mme. Camusot was a little, plump, fresh, fair-haired woman, with a very prominent forehead, a mouth which receded, and a turned-up chin, a type of countenance which is passable in youth, but looks old before the time. Her bright, quick eyes expressed her innocent desire to get on in the world, and the envy born of her present inferior position, with rather too much candor ; but still they lighted up her commonplace face and set it off with a certain energy of feeling, which success was certain to extinguish in later life. At that time she used to give a good deal of time and thought to her dresses, inventing trimmings and embroidering them ; she planned out her

costumes with the maid whom she had brought with her from Paris, and so maintained the reputation of Parisiennes in the provinces. Her caustic tongue was dreaded; she was not beloved. In that keen, investigating spirit peculiar to unoccupied women who are driven to find some occupation for empty days, she had pondered the president's private opinions, until at length she discovered what he meant to do, and for some time past she had advised Camusot to declare war. The young count's affair was an excellent opportunity. Was it not obviously Camusot's part to make a stepping-stone of this criminal case by favoring the d'Esgrignons, a family with power of a very different kind from the power of the du Croisier party.

"Sauvager will never marry Mademoiselle Duval. They are dangling her before him, but he will be the dupe of those Machiavels in the Val-Noble to whom he is going to sacrifice his position. Camusot, this affair, so unfortunate as it is for the d'Esgrignons, so insidiously brought on by the president for du Croisier's benefit, will turn out well for nobody but *you*," she had said, as they went in.

The shrewd Parisienne had likewise guessed the president's underhand manœuvres with the Blandureaus, and his object in baffling old Blondet's efforts, but she saw nothing to be gained by opening the eyes of father or son to the perils of the situation; she was enjoying the beginning of the comedy; she knew about the proposals made by Chesnel's successor on behalf of Fabien du Ronceret, but she did not suspect how important that secret might be to her. If she or her husband were threatened by the president, Mme. Camusot could threaten too, in her turn, to call the amateur gardener's attention to a scheme for carrying off the flower which he meant to transplant into his home.

Chesnel had not penetrated, like Mme. Camusot, into the means by which Sauvager had been won over; but by dint of looking into the various lives and interests of the men grouped

about the lilies of the Tribunal, he knew that he could count upon the public prosecutor, upon Camusot, and M. Michu. Two judges for the d'Esgrignons would paralyze the rest. And, finally, Chesnel knew old Blondet well enough to feel sure that if he ever swerved from impartiality, it would be for the sake of the work of his whole lifetime—to secure his son's appointment. So Chesnel slept, full of confidence, on the resolve to go to M. Blondet and offer to realize his so long-cherished hopes, while he opened his eyes to President du Ronceret's treachery. Blondet won over, he would take a peremptory tone with the examining magistrate, to whom he hoped to prove that, if Victurnien was not blameless, he had been merely imprudent; the whole thing should be shown in the light of a boy's thoughtless escapade.

But Chesnel slept neither soundly nor for long. Before dawn he was awakened by his housekeeper. The most bewitching person in this history, the most adorable youth on the face of the globe, Mme. la Duchesse de Maufrigneuse herself, in man's attire, had driven alone from Paris in a calèche, and was waiting to see him.

"I have come to save him or to die with him," said she, addressing the notary, who thought that he was dreaming. "I have brought a hundred thousand francs, given me by his majesty out of his private purse, to buy Victurnien's innocence, if his adversary can be bribed. If we fail utterly, I have brought poison to snatch him away before anything takes place, before even the indictment is drawn up. But we shall not fail. I have sent word to the public prosecutor; he is on the road behind me; he could not travel in my calèche, because he wished to take the instructions of the keeper of the seals."

Chesnel rose to the occasion and played up to the duchess; he wrapped himself in his dressing-gown, fell at her feet and kissed them, not without asking her pardon for forgetting himself in his joy.

"We are saved!" cried he; and gave orders to Brigitte to see that Mme. la Duchesse had all that she needed after traveling post all night. He appealed to the fair Diane's spirit, by making her see that it was absolutely necessary that she should visit the examining magistrate before daylight, lest any one should discover the secret, or so much as imagine that the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse had come. *

"And have I not a passport in due form?" quoth she, displaying a sheet of paper, wherein she was described as M. le Vicomte Félix de Vandenesse, master of requests, and his majesty's private secretary. "And do I not play my man's part well?" she added, running her fingers through her wig *à la Titus*, and twirling her riding switch.

"Oh! Madame la Duchesse, you are an angel!" cried Chesnel, with tears in his eyes. (She was destined always to be an angel, even in man's attire.) "Button up your great-coat, muffle yourself up to the eyes in your traveling cloak, take my arm, and let us go as quickly as possible to Camusot's house before anybody can meet us."

"Then am I going to see a man called Camusot?" she asked.

"With a nose to match his name,"* assented old Maître Chesnel.

The old notary felt his heart dead within him, but he thought it none the less necessary to humor the duchess, to laugh when she laughed, and shed tears when she wept; groaning in spirit, all the same, over the feminine frivolity which could find matter for a jest while setting about a matter so serious. What would he not have done to save the count? While Chesnel dressed, Mme. de Maufrigneuse sipped the cup of coffee and cream which Brigitte brought her, and agreed with herself that provincial women cooks are superior to the Parisian *chefs*, who despise the little details which make all the difference to an epicure. Thanks to Chesnel's taste for

* *Camus*, flat-nosed.

delicate fare, Brigitte was found prepared to set an excellent meal before the duchess.

Chesnel and his charming companion set out for M. and Mme. Camusot's house.

"Ah! so there is a Madame Camusot?" said the duchess. "Then the affair may be managed."

"And so much the more readily, because the lady is visibly enough tired of living among us provincials; she comes from Paris," said Chesnel.

"Then we must have no secrets from her?"

"You will judge how much to tell or to conceal," Chesnel replied humbly. "I am sure that she will be greatly flattered to be the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse's hostess; you will be obliged to stay in her house until nightfall, I expect, unless you find it inconvenient to remain."

"Is this Madame Camusot a good-looking woman?" asked the duchess, with a coxcomb's air.

"She is certainly a bit of a queen in her own house," he made reply.

"Then she is sure to meddle in court-house affairs," returned the duchess. "Nowhere but in France, my dear Monsieur Chesnel, do you see women so much wedded to their husbands that they are wedded to their husbands' professions, work, or business as well. In Italy, England, and Germany, women make it a point of honor to leave men to fight their own battles; they shut their eyes to their husbands' work as perseveringly as our French citizens' wives do all that in them lies to understand the position of their joint-stock partnership; is not that what you call it in your legal language? Frenchwomen are so incredibly jealous in the conduct of their married life that they insist on knowing everything; and that is how, in the least difficulty, you feel the wife's hand in the business; the Frenchwoman advises, guides, and warns her husband. And, truth to tell, the man is none the worse off. In England, if a married man is put in prison

for debt for twenty-four hours, his wife will be jealous and make a scene when he comes back."

"Here we are, without meeting a soul on the way," said Chesnel. "You are the more sure of complete ascendancy here, Madame la Duchesse, since Madame Camusot's father is one Thirion, usher of the royal cabinet."

"And the King never thought of that!" exclaimed the duchess. "He thinks of nothing! Thirion introduced us, the Prince de Cadignan, Monsieur de Vandenesse, and me! We shall have it all our own way in this house. Settle everything with Monsieur Camusot while I talk to his wife."

The maid, who was washing and dressing the children, showed the visitors into the little fireless dining-room.

"Take that card to your mistress," said the duchess, lowering her voice for the woman's ear; "nobody else is to see it. If you are discreet, child, you shall not lose by it."

At the sound of a woman's voice, and the sight of the handsome young man's face, the maid looked thunderstruck.

"Wake Monsieur Camusot," said Chesnel, "and tell him that I am waiting to see him on important business," and she departed upstairs forthwith.

A few minutes later, Mme. Camusot, in her dressing-gown, sprang downstairs and brought the handsome stranger into her room. She had pushed Camusot out of bed and into his study with all his clothes, bidding him dress himself at once and wait there. The transformation scene had been brought about by a bit of pasteboard with the words *MADAME LA DUCHESSE DE MAUFRIGNEUSE* engraved upon it. A daughter of the usher of the royal cabinet took in the whole situation at once.

"Well!" exclaimed the maidservant, left with Chesnel in the dining-room, "would not any one think that a thunder-bolt had dropped in among us? The master is dressing in his study; you may go upstairs."

"Not a word of all this, mind," said Chesnel.

Now that he was conscious of the support of a great lady

who had the King's consent (by word of mouth) to the measures about to be taken for rescuing the Comte d'Esgrignon, he spoke with an air of authority which served his cause much better with Camusot than the humility with which he would otherwise have approached him.

"Sir," said he, "the words let fall last evening may have surprised you, but they are serious. The house d'Esgrignon counts upon you for the proper conduct of investigations from which it must issue without a spot."

"I shall pass over anything in your remarks, sir, which must be offensive to me personally and obnoxious to justice; for your position with regard to the d'Esgrignons excuses you up to a certain point, but——"

"Pardon me, sir, if I interrupt you," said Chesnel. "I have just spoken aloud the things which your superiors are thinking and dare not avow; though what those things are any intelligent man can guess, and you are an intelligent man. Grant that the young man had acted imprudently, can you suppose that the sight of a d'Esgrignon dragged into an Assize Court can be gratifying to the King, the Court, or the Ministry? Is it to the interest of the kingdom, or of the country, that historic houses should fall? Is not the existence of a great aristocracy, consecrated by time, a guarantee of that Equality which is the catchword of the Opposition at this moment? Well and good; now not only has there not been the slightest imprudence, but we are innocent victims caught in a trap."

"I am curious to know how," said the examining magistrate.

"For the last two years, the *Sieur du Croisier* has regularly allowed *Monsieur le Comte d'Esgrignon* to draw upon him for very large sums," said Chesnel. "We are going to produce drafts for more than a hundred thousand crowns, which he continually met; the amounts being remitted by me—bear that well in mind—either before or after the bills fell due.

Monsieur le Comte d'Esgrignon is in a position to produce a receipt for the sum paid by him, before this bill, this alleged forgery, was drawn. Can you fail to see in that case that this charge is a piece of spite and party feeling? And a charge brought against the heir of a great house by one of the most dangerous enemies of the throne and altar, what is it but an odious slander? There has been no more forgery in this affair than there has been in my office. Summon Madame du Croisier, who knows nothing as yet of the charge of forgery; she will declare to you that I brought the money and paid it over to her, so that in her husband's absence she might remit the amount for which he has not asked her. Examine du Croisier on the point; he will tell you that he knows nothing of my payment to Madame du Croisier."

"You may make such assertions as these, sir, in Monsieur d'Esgrignon's salon, or in any other house where people know nothing of business, and they may be believed; but no examining magistrate, unless he is a driveling idiot, can imagine that a woman like Madame du Croisier, so submissive as she is to her husband, has a hundred thousand crowns lying in her desk at this moment, without saying a word to him; nor yet that an old notary would not have advised Monsieur du Croisier of the deposit on his return to town."

"The old notary, sir, had gone to Paris to put a stop to the young man's extravagance."

"I have not yet examined the Comte d'Esgrignon," Camusot began; "his answers will point out my duty."

"Is he in close custody?"

"Yes."

"Sir," said Chesnel, seeing danger ahead, "the examination can be made in our interests or against them. But there are two courses open to you: you can establish the fact on Madame du Croisier's deposition that the amount was deposited with her before the bill was drawn; or you can examine the unfortunate young man implicated in this affair, and he in

his confusion may remember nothing and commit himself. You will decide which is the more credible—a slip of memory on the part of a woman in her ignorance of business, or a forgery committed by a d'Esgrignon."

"All this is beside the point," began Camusot; "the question is, whether Monsieur le Comte d'Esgrignon has or has not used the lower half of a letter addressed to him by du Croisier as a bill of exchange."

"Eh! and so he might," a voice cried suddenly, as Madame Camusot broke in, followed by the handsome stranger, "so he might, when Monsieur Chesnel had advanced the money to meet the bill——"

She leaned over her husband.

"You will have the first vacant appointment as assistant judge at Paris, you are serving the King himself in this affair; I have proof of it; you will not be forgotten," she said, lowering her voice for his ear. "This young man that you see here is the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse; you must never have seen her, and do all that you can for the young count boldly."

"Gentlemen," said Camusot, "even if the preliminary examination is conducted to prove the young count's innocence, can I answer for the view the court may take? Monsieur Chesnel, and you also, my sweet, know what Monsieur le Président wants."

"Tut, tut, tut!" said Mme. Camusot, "go yourself to Monsieur Michu this morning, and tell him that the count has been arrested; you will be two against two in that case, I will be bound. *Michu* comes from Paris, and you know that he is devoted to the noblesse. Good blood cannot lie."

At that very moment Mlle. Cadot's voice was heard in the doorway. She had brought a note, and was waiting for an answer. Camusot went out, and came back again to read the note aloud:

"M. le Vice-Président begs M. Camusot to sit in audience to-day and for the next few days, so that there may be a quorum during M. le Président's absence."

"Then there is an end of the preliminary examination!" cried Mme. Camusot. "Did I not tell you, dear, that they would play you some ugly trick? The president has gone off to slander you to the public prosecutor and the president of the Court-Royal. You will be changed before you can make the examination. Is that clear?"

"You will stay, monsieur," said the duchess. "The public prosecutor is coming, I hope, in time."

"When the public prosecutor arrives," little Mme. Camusot said, with some heat, "he must find all over. Yes, my dear, yes," she added, looking full at her amazed husband. "Ah! old hypocrite of a president, you are setting your wits against us; you shall remember it! You have a mind to help us to a dish of your own making, you shall have two served up to you by your humble servant Cécile-Amélie Thirion! Poor old Blondet! It is lucky for him that the president has taken this journey to turn us out, for now that great oaf of a Joseph Blondet will marry Mademoiselle Blاندureau. I will let Father Blondet have some seeds in return. As for you, Camusot, go to Monsieur Michu's, while Madame la Duchesse and I will go to find old Blondet. You must expect to hear it said all over the town to-morrow that I took a walk with a lover this morning."

Mme. Camusot took the duchess' arm, and they went through the town by deserted streets to avoid any unpleasant adventure on the way to the old vice-president's house. Chesnel meanwhile conferred with the young count in prison; Camusot had arranged a stolen interview. Cook-maids, servants, and the other early risers of a country town, seeing Mme. Camusot and the duchess taking their way through the back streets, took the young gentleman for an adorer from

Paris. That evening, as Cécile-Amélie had said, the news of her behavior was circulated about the town, and more than one scandalous rumor was occasioned thereby. Mme. Camusot and her supposed lover found old Blondet in his greenhouse. He greeted his colleague's wife and her companion, and gave the charming young man a keen, uneasy glance.

"I have the honor to introduce one of my husband's cousins," said Mme. Camusot, bringing forward the duchess; "he is one of the most distinguished horticulturists in Paris; and as he cannot spend more than the one day with us, on his way back from Brittany, and has heard of your flowers and plants, I have taken the liberty of coming early."

"Oh, the gentleman is a horticulturist, is he?" said old Blondet.

The duchess bowed.

"This is my coffee-plant," said Blondet, "and here is a tea-plant."

"What can have taken Monsieur le Président away from home?" put in Mme. Camusot. "I will wager that his absence concerns Monsieur Camusot."

"Exactly. This, monsieur, is the queerest of all cacti," he continued, producing a flower-pot which appeared to contain a piece of mildewed rattan; "it comes from Australia. You are very young, sir, to be a horticulturist."

"Dear Monsieur Blondet, never mind your flowers," said Mme. Camusot. "*You* are concerned, you and your hopes, and your son's marriage with Mademoiselle Blandureau. You are duped by the president."

"Bah!" said old Blondet, with an incredulous air.

"Yes," retorted she. "If you cultivated people a little more and your flowers a little less, you would know that the dowry and the hopes that you have sown, and watered, and tilled, and weeded are on the point of being gathered now by cunning hands."

"Madame!——"

"Oh, nobody in the town will have the courage to fly in the president's face and warn you. I, however, do not belong to the town, and, thanks to this obliging young man, I shall soon be going back to Paris; so I can inform you that Chesnel's successor has made formal proposals for Mademoiselle Claire Blandureau's hand on behalf of young du Ronceret, who is to have fifty thousand crowns from his parents. As for Fabien, he has made up his mind to receive a call to the bar, so as to gain an appointment as judge."

Old Blondet dropped the flower-pot which he had brought out for the duchess to see.

"Oh, my cactus! Oh, my son! and Mademoiselle Blandureau! Look here! the cactus flower is broken to pieces."

"No," Mme. Camusot answered, laughing; "everything can be put right. If you have a mind to see your son a judge in another month, we will tell you how you must set to work and——"

"Step this way, sir, and you will see my pelargoniums, an enchanting sight while they are in flower——" Then he added to Mme. Camusot, "Why did you speak of these matters while your cousin was present?"

"All depends upon him," replied Mme. Camusot. "Your son's appointment is lost for ever if you let fall a word about this young man."

"Bah!"

"The young man is a flower——"

"Ah!"

"He is the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse, sent here by his majesty to save young d'Esgrignon, whom they arrested yesterday on a charge of forgery brought against him by du Croisier. Madame la Duchesse has authority from the keeper of the seals; he will ratify any promises that she makes to each of——"

"My cactus is all right!" exclaimed Blondet, peering at his precious plant. "Go on; I am listening."

"Take counsel with Camusot and Michu to hush up the affair as soon as possible, and your son will get the appointment. It will come in time enough to baffle du Ronceret's underhand dealings with the Blandureaus. Your son will be something better than assistant judge; he will have Monsieur Camusot's post within the year. The public prosecutor will be here to-day. Monsieur Sauvager will be obliged to resign, I expect, after his conduct in this affair. At the court my husband will show you documents which completely exonerate the count and prove that the forgery was a trap of du Croisier's own setting."

Old Blondet went into the Olympic circus where his six thousand pelargoniums stood, and made his bow to the duchesse.

"Monsieur," said he, "if your wishes do not exceed the law, this thing may be done."

"Monsieur," returned the duchesse, "send in your resignation to Monsieur Chesnel to-morrow, and I will promise you that your son shall be appointed within the week; but you must not resign until you have had confirmation of my promise from the public prosecutor. You men of law will come to a better understanding among yourselves. Only let him know that the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse has pledged her word to you. And not a word as to my journey hither," she added.

The old judge kissed her hand and began recklessly to gather his best flowers for her.

"Can you think of it? Give them to madame," said the duchesse. "A young man would not have flowers about him when he had a pretty woman on his arm."

"Before you go down to the court," added Mme. Camusot, "ask Chesnel's successor about those proposals that he made in the name of Monsieur and Madame du Ronceret."

Old Blondet, quite overcome by this revelation of the president's duplicity, stood planted on his feet by the wicket-

gate, looking after the two women as they hurried away through by-streets home again. The edifice raised so painfully during ten years for his beloved son was crumbling visibly before his eyes. Was it possible? He suspected some trick, and hurried away to Chesnel's successor.

At half-past nine, before the court was sitting, Vice-President Blondet, Camusot, and Michu met with remarkable punctuality in the council chamber. Blondet locked the door with some precautions when Camusot and Michu came in together.

"Well, M'sieur Vice-President," began Michu, "Monsieur Sauvager, without consulting the public prosecutor, has issued a warrant for the apprehension of one Comte d'Esgrignon, in order to serve a grudge borne against him by one du Croisier, an enemy of the King's government. It is a regular topsyturvy affair. The president, for his part, goes away, and thereby puts a stop to the preliminary examination! And we know nothing of the matter. Do they, by any chance, mean to force our hand?"

"This is the first word I have heard of it," said the vice-president. He was furious with the president for stealing a march on him with the Blandureaus. Chesnel's successor, the du Roncerets' man, had just fallen into a snare set by the old judge; the truth was out, he knew the secret.

"It is lucky that we spoke to you about that matter, my dear master," said Camusot, "or you might have given up all hope of seating your son on the bench or of marrying him to Mademoiselle Blandureau."

"But it is no question of my son, nor of his marriage," said the vice-president; "we are talking of young Comte d'Esgrignon. Is he or is he not guilty?"

"It seems that Chesnel deposited the amount to meet the bill with Madame du Croisier," said Michu, "and a crime has been made of a mere irregularity. According to the charge, the count made use of the lower half of a letter bear-

ing du Croisier's signature as a draft which he cashed at the Kellers'."

"An imprudent thing to do," was Camusot's comment.

"But why is du Croisier proceeding against him if the amount was paid in beforehand?" asked Vice-President Blondet.

"He does not know that the money was deposited with his wife; or he pretends that he does not know," said Camusot.

"It is a piece of provincial spite," said Michu.

"Still it looks like a forgery to me," said old Blondet.

No passion could obscure judicial clear-sightedness in him.

"Do you think so?" returned Camusot. "But, at the outset, supposing that the count had no business to draw upon du Croisier, there would still be no forgery of the signature; and the count believed that he had a right to draw on Croisier when Chesnel advised him that the money had been placed to his credit."

"Well, then, where is the forgery?" asked Blondet. "It is the intent to defraud which constitutes forgery in a civil action."

"Oh, it is clear, if you take du Croisier's version for truth, that the signature was diverted from its purpose to obtain a sum of money in spite of du Croisier's contrary injunction to his bankers," Camusot answered.

"Gentlemen," said Blondet, "this seems to me to be a mere trifle, a quibble. Suppose you had the money, I ought perhaps to have waited until I had your authorization; but I, Comte d'Esgrignon, was pressed for money, so I—— Come, come, your prosecution is a piece of revengeful spite. Forgery is defined by the law as an attempt to obtain any advantage which rightfully belongs to another. There is no forgery here, according to the letter of the Roman law, nor according to the spirit of modern jurisprudence (always from the point of view of a civil action, for we are not here concerned with the falsification of public or authentic documents). Between

private individuals the essence of a forgery is the intent to defraud ; where is it in this case ? In what times are we living, gentlemen ? Here is the president going away to balk a preliminary examination which ought to be over by this time ! Until to-day I did not know Monsieur le Président, but he shall have the benefit of arrears ; from this time forth he shall draft his decisions himself. You must set about this affair with all possible speed, Monsieur Camusot."

"Yes," said Michu. "In my opinion, instead of letting the young man out on bail, we ought to pull him out of this mess at once. Everything turns on the examination of du Croisier and his wife. You might summon them to appear while the court is sitting, Monsieur Camusot ; take down their depositions before four o'clock, send in your report to-night, and we will give our decision in the morning before the court sits."

"We will settle what course to pursue while the barristers are pleading," said Vice-President Blondet, addressing Camusot.

And with that the three judges put on their robes and went into court.

At noon Mlle. Armande and the bishop reached the Hôtel d'Esgrignon ; Chesnel and M. Couturier were there to meet them. There was a sufficiently short conference between the prelate and Mme. du Croisier's director, and the latter set out at once to visit his charge.

At eleven o'clock that morning du Croisier received a summons to appear in the examining magistrate's office between one and two in the afternoon. Thither he betook himself, consumed by well-founded suspicions. It was impossible that the president should have foreseen the arrival of the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse upon the scene, the return of the public prosecutor, and the hasty confabulation of his learned brethren ; so he had omitted to trace out a plan for du Croisier's guidance in the event of the preliminary examination taking place. Neither of the pair imagined that the proceedings would be

hurried on in this way. Du Croisier obeyed the summons at once; he wanted to know how M. Camusot was disposed to act. So he was compelled to answer the questions put to him. Camusot addressed him in summary fashion with the six following inquiries:

"Was the signature on the bill alleged to be a forgery in your handwriting? Had you previously done business with Monsieur le Comte d'Esgrignon? Was not Monsieur le Comte d'Esgrignon in the habit of drawing upon you, with or without advice? Did you not write a letter authorizing Monsieur d'Esgrignon to rely upon you at any time? Had not Chesnel squared the account not once, but many times already? Were you not away from home when this took place?"

All these questions the banker answered in the affirmative. In spite of wordy explanations, the magistrate always brought him back to a "Yes" or "No." When the questions and answers had been alike resumed in the *procès-verbal*, the examining magistrate brought out a final thunderbolt.

"Was du Croisier aware that the money destined to meet the bill had been deposited with him, du Croisier, according to Chesnel's declaration, and a letter of advice sent by the said Chesnel to the Comte d'Esgrignon, five days before the date of the bill?"

That last question frightened du Croisier. He asked what was meant by it, and whether he was supposed to be the defendant and M. le Comte d'Esgrignon the plaintiff? He called the magistrate's attention to the fact that if the money had been deposited with him, there was no ground for the action.

"Justice is seeking information," said the magistrate, as he dismissed the witness, but not before he had taken down du Croisier's last observation.

"But the money, sir——"

"The money is at your house."

Chesnel, likewise summoned, came forward to explain the matter. The truth of his assertions was borne out by Mme. du Croisier's deposition. The count had already been examined. Prompted by Chesnel, he produced du Croisier's first letter, in which he begged the count to draw upon him without the insulting formality of depositing the amount beforehand. The Comte d'Esgrignon next brought out a letter in Chesnel's handwriting, by which the notary advised him of the deposit of a hundred thousand crowns with M. du Croisier. With such primary facts as these to bring forward as evidence, the young count's innocence was bound to emerge triumphantly from a court of law.

Du Croisier went home from the court, his face white with rage, and the foam of repressed fury on his lips. His wife was sitting by the fireside in the drawing-room at work upon a pair of slippers for him. She trembled when she looked into his face, but her mind was made up.

"Madame," he stammered out, "what deposition is this that you made before the magistrate? You have dishonored, ruined, and betrayed me!"

"I have saved you, monsieur," answered she. "If some day you will have the honor of connecting yourself with the d'Esgrignons by marrying your niece to the count, it will be entirely owing to my conduct to-day."

"A miracle!" cried he. "Balaam's ass has spoken. Nothing will astonish me after this. And where are the hundred thousand crowns which (so Monsieur Camusot tells me) are here in my house?"

"Here they are," said she, pulling out a bundle of bank-notes from beneath the cushions of her settee. "I have not committed mortal sin by declaring that Monsieur Chesnel gave them into my keeping."

"While I was away?"

"You were not here."

"Will you swear that to me on your salvation?"

"I swear it," she said composedly.

"Then why did you say nothing to me about it?" demanded he.

"I was wrong there," said his wife; "but my mistake was all for your good. Your niece will be Marquise d'Esgrignon some of these days, and you will perhaps be a deputy, if you behave well in this deplorable business. You have gone too far; you must find out how to get back again."

Du Croisier, under stress of painful agitation, strode up and down his drawing-room; while his wife, in no less agitation, awaited the result of this exercise. Du Croisier at length rang the bell.

"I am not at home to any one to-night," he said, when the man appeared; "shut the gates; and if any one calls, tell them that your mistress and I have gone into the country. We shall start directly after dinner, and dinner must be half an hour earlier than usual."

The great news was discussed that evening in every drawing-room; little storekeepers, working people, beggars, the noblesse, the merchant class—the whole town, in short, was talking of the Comte d'Esgrignon's arrest on a charge of forgery. The Comte d'Esgrignon would be tried in the Assize Court; he would be condemned and branded. Most of those who cared for the honor of the family denied the fact. At nightfall Chesnel went to Mme. Camusot and escorted the stranger to the Hôtel d'Esgrignon. Poor Mlle. Armande was expecting him; she led the fair duchess to her own room, which she had given up to her, for his lordship the bishop occupied Victurnien's chamber; and, left alone with her guest, the noble woman glanced at the duchess with most piteous eyes.

"You owed help, indeed, madame, to the poor boy who ruined himself for your sake," she said; "the boy to whom we are all of us sacrificing ourselves."

The duchess had already made a woman's survey of Mlle. d'Esgrignon's room; the cold, bare, comfortless chamber, that might have been a nun's cell, was like a picture of the life of the heroic woman before her. The duchess saw it all—past, present, and future—with rising emotion, felt the incongruity of her presence, and could not keep back the falling tears that made answer for her.

But in Mlle. Armande the Christian overcame Victurnien's aunt. "Ah, I was wrong; forgive me, Madame la Duchesse; you did not know how poor we were, and my nephew was incapable of the admission. And beside, now that I see you, I can understand all—even the crime!"

And Mlle. Armande, withered and thin and white, but beautiful as those tall, austere slender figures which German art alone can paint, had tears, too, in her eyes.

"Do not fear, dear angel?" the duchess said at last; "he is safe."

"Yes, but honor?—and his career? Chesnel told me; the King knows the truth."

"We will think of a way of repairing the evil," said the duchess.

Mlle. Armande went downstairs to the salon, and found the Collection of Antiquities complete to a man. Every one of them had come, partly to do honor to the bishop, partly to rally round the marquis; but Chesnel, posted in the ante-chamber, warned each new arrival to say no word of the affair, that the aged marquis might never know that such a thing had been. The loyal Frank was quite capable of killing his son or du Croisier; for either the one or the other must have been guilty of death in his eyes. It chanced, strangely enough, that he talked more of Victurnien than usual; he was glad that his son had gone back to Paris. The King would give Victurnien a place before very long; the King was interesting himself at last in the d'Esgrignons. And his friends, their hearts dead within them, praised Victurnien's conduct to the

skies. Mlle. Armande prepared the way for her nephew's sudden appearance among them by remarking to her brother that Victurnien would be sure to come to see them, and that he must be even then on his way.

"Bah!" said the marquis, standing with his back to the hearth, "if he is doing well where he is, he ought to stay there, and not to be thinking of the joy it would give his old father to see him again. The King's service has the first claim."

Scarcely one of those present heard the words without a shudder. Justice might give over a d'Esgrignon to the executioner's branding-iron. There was a dreadful pause. The old Marquise de Castéran could not keep back a tear that stole down over her rouge, and turned her half-palsied head away to hide it.

Next day at noon, in the sunny weather, a whole excited population was dispersed in groups along the high street, which ran through the heart of the town, and nothing was talked of but the great affair. Was the count in prison or was he not? All at once the Comte d'Esgrignon's well-known tilbury was seen driving down the Rue Saint-Blaise; it had evidently come from the prefecture, the count himself was on the box-seat, and by his side sat a charming young man, whom nobody recognized. The pair were laughing and talking and in great spirits. They wore Bengal roses in their button-holes. Altogether, it was a theatrical surprise which words would fail to describe.

At ten o'clock the court had decided to dismiss the charge, stating their very sufficient reasons for setting the count at liberty, in a document which contained a thunderbolt for du Croisier, in the shape of an "Inasmuch" that gave the count the right to institute proceedings for libel. Old Chesnel was walking up the Grande Rue, as if by accident, telling all who cared to hear him that du Croisier had set the most shameful snares for the d'Esgrignons' honor, and that it was entirely

owing to the forbearance and magnanimity of the family that he was not prosecuted for slander.

On the evening of that famous day, after the Marquis d'Esgrignon had gone to bed, the count, Mlle. Armande, and the chevalier were left with the handsome young page, now about to return to Paris. The charming cavalier's sex could not be hidden from the chevalier, and he alone, beside the three officials and Mme. Camusot, knew that the duchess had been among them.

"The house is saved," began Chesnel, "but after this shock it will take a hundred years to rise again. The debts must be paid now; you must marry an heiress, Monsieur le Comte, there is nothing else left for you to do."

"And take her where you can find her," said the duchess.

"A second *mésalliance*!" exclaimed Mlle. Armande.

The duchess began to laugh.

"It is better to marry than to die," said she. As she spoke she drew from her waistcoat pocket a tiny crystal phial that came from the court apothecary.

Mlle. Armande shrank away in horror. Old Chesnel took the fair Maufrigneuse's hand, and kissed it without permission.

"Are you all out of your minds here?" continued the duchess. "Do you really expect to live in the fifteenth century when the rest of the world has reached the nineteenth? My dear children, there is no noblesse nowadays; there is no aristocracy left! Napoleon's Code Civil made an end of the parchments, exactly as cannon made an end of feudal castles. When you have some money, you will be very much more of nobles than you are now. Marry anybody you please, Victurnien, you will raise your wife to your rank; that is the most substantial privilege left to the French noblesse. Did not Monsieur de Talleyrand marry Madame Grandt without compromising his position? Remember that Louis XIV. took the Widow Scarron for his wife."

"He did not marry her for her money," interposed Mlle. Armande.

"If the Comtesse d'Esgrignon were one du Croisier's niece, for instance, would you receive her?" asked Chesnel.

"Perhaps," replied the duchess; "but the King, beyond all doubt, would be very glad to see her. So you do not know what is going on in the world?" continued she, seeing the amazement in their faces. "Victurnien has been in Paris; he knows how things go there. We had more influence under Napoleon. Marry Mademoiselle Duval, Victurnien; she will be just as much Marquise d'Esgrignon as I am Duchesse de Maufrigneuse."

"All is lost—even honor!" said the chevalier, with a wave of the hand.

"Farewell, Victurnien," said the duchess, kissing her lover on the forehead; "we shall not see each other again. Live on your lands; that is the best thing for you to do; the air of Paris is not at all good for you."

"Diane!" the young count cried despairingly.

"Monsieur, you forget yourself strangely," the duchess retorted coolly, as she laid aside her rôle of man and mistress, and became not merely an angel again, but a duchess, and not only a duchess, but Molière's Célimène.

The Duchesse de Maufrigneuse made a stately bow to these four personages, and drew from the chevalier his last tear of admiration at the service of *le beau sexe*.

"How like she is to the Princess Goritzza!" he exclaimed in a low voice.

Diane had disappeared. The crack of the postillion's whip told Victurnien that the fair romance of his first love was over. While the peril lasted, Diane could still see her lover in the young count; but out of danger, she despised him for the weakling that he was.

Six months afterward, Camusot received the appointment

of assistant judge at Paris, and later he became an examining magistrate. Goodman Blondet was made a councilor to the Court-Royal; he held the post just long enough to secure a retiring pension, and then went back to live in his pretty little house. Joseph Blondet sat in his father's seat at the court till the end of his days; there was not the faintest chance of promotion for him, but he became Mlle. Blandureau's husband; and she, no doubt, is leading to-day, in the little flower-covered brick house, as dull a life as any carp in a marble basin. Michu and Camusot also received the cross of the Legion of Honor, while Blondet became an officer. As for M. Sauvager, deputy public prosecutor, he was sent to Corsica, to du Croisier's great relief; he had decidedly no mind to bestow his niece upon that functionary.

Du Croisier himself, urged by President du Ronceret, appealed from the finding of the Tribunal to the Court-Royal, and lost his cause. The Liberals throughout the department held that little d'Esgrignon was guilty; while the Royalists, on the other hand, told frightful stories of plots woven by "that abominable du Croisier" to compass his revenge. A duel was fought indeed; the hazard of arms favored du Croisier, the young count was dangerously wounded, and his antagonist maintained his words. This affair embittered the strife between the two parties; the Liberals brought it forward on all occasions. Meanwhile du Croisier never could carry his election, and saw no hope of marrying his niece to the count, especially after the duel.

A month after the decision of the Tribunal was confirmed in the Court-Royal, Chesnel died, exhausted by the dreadful strain, which had weakened and shaken him mentally and physically. He died in the hour of victory, like some old faithful hound that has brought the boar to bay, and gets his death on the tusks. He died as happily as might be, seeing that he left the great House all but ruined, and the heir in penury, bored to death by an idle life, and without a hope of

establishing himself. That bitter thought and his own exhaustion, no doubt, hastened the old man's end. One great comfort came to him as he lay amid the wreck of so many hopes, sinking under the burden of so many cares—the old marquis, at his sister's entreaty, gave him back all the old friendship. The great lord came to the little house in the Rue du Bercaill, and sat by his old servant's bedside, all unaware how much that servant had done and sacrificed for him. Chesnel sat upright and repeated Simeon's cry—*nunc dimittis*. The marquis allowed them to bury Chesnel in the castle chapel; they laid him crosswise at the foot of the tomb which was waiting for the marquis himself, the last, in a sense, of the d'Esgrignons.

And so died one of the last representatives of that great and beautiful thing, Service; giving to that often discredited word its original meaning, the relation between feudal lord and servitor. That relation, only to be found in some out-of-the-way province or among a few old servants of the King, did honor alike to a noblesse that could call forth such affection, and to a bourgeoisie that could conceive it. Such noble and magnificent devotion is no longer possible among us. Noble houses have no servitors left; even as France has no longer a King, nor an hereditary peerage, nor lands that are bound irrevocably to a historic house, that the glorious names of a nation may be perpetuated. Chesnel was not merely one of the obscure great men of private life; he was something more—he was a great fact. In his sustained self-devotion is there not something indefinitely solemn and sublime, something that rises above the one beneficent deed, or the heroic height which is reached by a moment's supreme effort? Chesnel's virtues belong essentially to the classes which stand between the poverty of the people on the one hand, and the greatness of the aristocracy on the other; for these can combine homely burgher virtues with the heroic ideals of the noble, enlightening both by a solid education,

Victurnien was not well looked upon at Court; there was no more chance of a great match for him, nor a place. His majesty steadily refused to raise the d'Esgrignons to the peerage, the one royal favor which could rescue Victurnien from his wretched position. It was impossible that he should marry a bourgeoisie heiress in his father's lifetime, so he was bound to live on shabbily under the paternal roof with memories of his two years of splendor in Paris, and the lost love of a great lady to bear him company. He grew moody and depressed, vegetating at home with a careworn aunt and a half broken-hearted father, who attributed his son's condition to a wasting malady. Chesnel was no longer there.

The marquis died in 1830. The great d'Esgrignon, with a following of all the less infirm noblesse from the Collection of Antiquities, went to wait upon Charles X. at Nonancourt; he paid his respects to his sovereign, and swelled the meagre train of the fallen king. It was an act of courage which seems simple enough to-day, but, in that time of enthusiastic revolt, it was heroism.

"The Gaul has conquered!" These were the marquis' last words.

By that time du Croisier's victory was complete. The new Marquis d'Esgrignon accepted Mlle. Duval as his wife a week after his old father's death. His bride brought him three millions of francs, for du Croisier and his wife settled the reversion of their fortunes upon her in the marriage-contract. Du Croisier took occasion to say during the ceremony that the d'Esgrignon family was the most honorable of all the ancient houses in France.

Some day the present Marquis d'Esgrignon will have an income of more than a hundred thousand crowns. You may see him in Paris, for he comes to town every winter and leads a jolly bachelor life, while he treats his wife with something more than the indifference of the *grand seigneur* of olden times; he takes no thought whatever for her.

“As for Mademoiselle d’Esgrignon,” said Émile Blondet, to whom all the detail of the story is due, “if she is no longer like the divinely fair woman whom I saw by glimpses in my childhood, she is decidedly, at the age of sixty-seven, the most pathetic and interesting figure in the Collection of Antiquities. She queens it among them still. I saw her when I made my last journey to my native place in search of the necessary papers for my marriage. When my father knew whom it was that I had married, he was struck dumb with amazement; he had not a word to say until I told him that I was a prefect.

“‘You were born to it,’ he said, with a smile.

“As I took a walk round the town, I met Mademoiselle Armande. She looked taller than ever. I looked at her, and thought of Marius among the ruins of Carthage. Had she not outlived her creed, and the beliefs that had been destroyed? She is a sad and silent woman, with nothing of her old beauty left except the eyes, that shine with an unearthly light. I watched her on her way to mass, with her book in her hand, and could not help thinking that she prayed God to take her out of the world.’”

LES JARDIES, *July*, 1837.



A MARRIAGE SETTLEMENT

(Le Contrat de Mariage).

TRANSLATED BY CLARA BELL.

To G. Rossini.

MONSIEUR DE MANERVILLE the elder was a worthy gentleman of Normandy, well known to the Maréchal de Richelieu, who arranged his marriage with one of the richest heiresses of Bordeaux at the time when the old duke held court in that city as governor of Guienne. The Norman gentleman sold the lands he owned in Bessin, and established himself as a Gascon, tempted to this step by the beauty of the estate of Lanstrac, a delightful residence belonging to his wife. Toward the end of Louis XV.'s reign, he purchased the post of major of the King's bodyguard, and lived till 1813, having happily survived the Revolution.

This was how: In the winter of 1790 he made a voyage to Martinique, where his wife had property, leaving the management of his estates in Gascony to a worthy notary's clerk named Mathias, who had some taint of the new ideas. On his return, the Comte de Manerville found his possessions safe and profitably managed. This shrewdness was the fruit of a graft of the Gascon on the Norman.

Madame de Manerville died in 1810. Her husband, having learned by the dissipations of his youth the importance of money, and, like many old men, ascribing to it a greater power in life than it possesses, became progressively thrifty, avaricious, and mean. Forgetting that stingy fathers make spendthrift sons, he allowed scarcely anything to his son, though he was an only child.

Paul de Manerville came home from college at Vendôme

toward the end of 1810, and for three years lived under his father's rule. The tyranny exercised by the old man of sixty-nine over his sole heir could not fail to affect a heart and character as yet unformed. Though he did not lack the physical courage which would seem to be in the air of Gascony, Paul dared not contend with his father, and lost the elasticity of resistance that gives rise to moral courage. His suppressed feelings were pent at the bottom of his heart, where he kept them long in reserve without daring to express them; thus, at a later time, when he felt that they were not in accordance with the maxims of the world, though he could think rightly, he could act wrongly. He would have fought at a word, while he quaked at the thought of sending away a servant; for his shyness found a field in any struggle which demanded persistent determination.

He was a prisoner in his father's old house, for he had not money enough to disport himself with the young men of the town; he envied them their amusements, but could not share them. The old gentleman took him out every evening in an antique vehicle, drawn by a pair of shabbily harnessed horses, attended by two antique and shabbily dressed menservants, into the society of a Royalist clique, consisting of the waifs of the nobility of the old Parlement and of the sword. These two bodies of magnates, uniting after the Revolution to resist Imperial influence, had by degrees become an aristocracy of landowners. Overpowered by the wealth and the shifting fortunes of a great seaport, this "Saint-Germain" suburb of Bordeaux responded with scorn to the magnificence of commerce and of the civil and military authorities.

His so monotonous existence might have killed the young man, but that his father's death delivered him from this tyranny at the time when it was becoming unendurable. Paul found that his father's avarice had accumulated a considerable fortune, and left him an estate in the most splendid possible order; but he had a horror of Bordeaux, and no love for

Lanstrac, where his father had always spent the summer and kept him out shooting from morning till night.

As soon as the legal business was completed, the young heir, eager for pleasure, invested his capital in securities, left the management of the land to old Mathias, his father's agent, and spent six years away from Bordeaux. Attaché at first to the embassy at Naples, he subsequently went as secretary to Madrid and London, thus making the tour of Europe. After gaining knowledge of the world, and dissipating a great many illusions, after spending all the money his father had saved, a moment came when Paul, to continue this dashing existence, had to draw on the revenues from his estate which the notary had saved for him. So, at this critical moment, struck by one of those impulses which are regarded as wisdom, he resolved to leave Paris, to return to Bordeaux, to manage his own affairs, to lead the life of a country gentleman, settling at Lanstrac and improving his estate—to marry, and one day to be elected deputy.

Paul was a count; titles were recovering their value in the matrimonial market; he could, and ought to marry well. Though many women wish to marry for a title, a great many more look for a husband who has an intimate acquaintance with life. And Paul—at a cost of seven hundred thousand francs, consumed in six years—had acquired this official knowledge, a qualification which cannot be sold, and which is worth more than a stockbroker's license; which, indeed, demands long studies, an apprenticeship, examinations, acquaintances, friends, and enemies, a certain elegance of appearance, good manners, and a handsome, tripping name; which brings with it success with women, duels, betting at races, many disappointments, dull hours, tiresome tasks, and indigestible pleasures.

In spite of lavish outlay, he had never been the fashion. In the burlesque army of the gay world, the man who is *the fashion* is the field-marshal of the forces, the merely elegant

man is the lieutenant-general. Still, Paul enjoyed his little reputation for elegance, and lived up to it. His servants were well drilled, his carriages were approved, his suppers had some success, and his bachelor's den was one of the seven or eight which were a match in luxury for the finest houses in Paris. But he had not broken a woman's heart; he played without losing, nor had he extraordinarily brilliant luck; he was too honest to be false to any one, even a girl of the streets; he did not leave his love-letters about, nor keep a boxful for his friends to dip into while he was shaving or putting a collar on; but, not wishing to damage his estates in Guienne, he had not the audacity that prompts a young man into startling speculations and attracts all eyes to watch him; he borrowed of no one, and was so wrong-headed as to lend to friends, who cut him and never mentioned him again, either for good or evil. He seemed to have worked out the sum of his extravagance. The secret of his character lay in his father's tyranny, which had made him a sort of social hybrid.

One morning Paul de Manerville said to a friend of his named de Marsay, who has since become famous—

“My dear fellow, life has a meaning.”

“You must be seven-and-twenty before you understand it,” said de Marsay, laughing at him.

“Yes, I am seven-and-twenty, and for that very reason I mean to go and live at Lanstrac as a country gentleman. At Bordeaux I shall have my father's old house, whither I shall send my Paris furniture, and I shall spend three months of every winter here in my rooms, which I shall not give up.”

“And you will marry?”

“I shall marry.”

“I am your friend, my worthy Paul, as you know,” said de Marsay, after a moment's silence; “well, be a good father and a good husband—and ridiculous for the rest of your days. If you could be happy being ridiculous, the matter would de-

serve consideration ; but you would not be happy. You have not a strong enough hand to rule a household. I do you every justice : you are a perfect horseman ; no one holds the ribbons better, makes a horse plunge, or keeps his seat more immovably. But, my dear boy, the paces of matrimony are quite another thing. Why, I can see you led at a round pace by Madame la Comtesse de Manerville, galloping, more often than not much against your will, and presently thrown—thrown into the ditch, and left there with both legs broken !

“ Listen to me. You have still forty-odd thousand francs a year in land in the Department of the Gironde. Take your horses and your servants, and furnish your house in Bordeaux ; you will be King in Bordeaux, you will promulgate there the decrees we pronounce in Paris, you will be the corresponding agent of our follies. Well and good. Commit follies in your provincial capital—nay, even absurdities. So much the better ; they may make you famous. But—do not marry.

“ Who are the men who marry nowadays ? Tradesmen, to increase their capital or to have a second hand at the plough ; peasants, who, by having large families, manufacture their own laborers ; stockbrokers or notaries, to get money to pay for their licenses ; the miserable kings, to perpetuate their miserable dynasties. We alone are free from the pack-saddle ; why insist on loading yourself ? In short, what do you marry for ? You must account for such a step to your best friend.

“ In the first place, if you should find an heiress as rich as yourself, eighty thousand francs a year for two are not the same thing as forty thousand for one, because you very soon are three—and four if you have a child. Do you really feel any affection for the foolish propagation of Manervilles, who will never give you anything but trouble ? Do you not know what the duties are of a father and mother ? Marriage, my dear Paul, is the most foolish of social sacrifices ; our children alone profit by it, and even they do not know its cost till their horses are cropping the weeds that grow over our graves.

“Do you, for instance, regret your father, the tyrant who wrecked your young life? How do you propose to make your children love you? Your plans for their education, your care for their advantage, your severity, however necessary, will alienate their affection. Children love a lavish or weak father, but later they will despise him. You are stranded between aversion and contempt. You cannot be a good father for the wishing.

“Look round on our friends, and name one you would like for a son. We have known some who were a disgrace to their name. Children, my dear boy, are a commodity very difficult to keep sweet. Yours will be angels! No doubt!

“But have you ever measured the gulf that separates the life of a single man from that of a married one? Listen. As you are, you can say: ‘I will never be ridiculous beyond a certain point; the public shall never think of me excepting as I choose that it should think.’ Married, you will fall into depths of the ridiculous! Unmarried, you make your own happiness; you want it to-day, you do without it to-morrow: married, you take it as it comes, and the day you seek it you have to do without it. Married, you are an ass; you calculate marriage-portions, you talk about public and religious morality, you look upon young men as immoral and dangerous; in short, you are socially Academical. I have nothing but pity for you! An old bachelor, whose relations are waiting for his money, and who struggles with his latest breath to make an old nurse give him something to drink, is in paradise compared with a married man. I say nothing of all the annoying, irritating, provoking, aggravating, stultifying, worrying things that may come to hypnotize and paralyze your mind and tyrannize over your life, in the course of the petty warfare of two human beings always together, united for ever, who have bound themselves, vainly believing that they will agree; no, that would be to repeat Boileau’s ‘Satire,’ and we know it by heart.

"I would forgive you the absurd notion if you would promise to marry like a grandee, to settle your fortune on your eldest son, to take advantage of the honeymoon stage to have two legitimate children, to give your wife a completely separate establishment, to meet her only in society, and never come home from a journey without announcing your return. Two hundred thousand francs a year are enough to do it on, and your antecedents allow of your achieving this by finding some rich Englishwoman hungering for a title. That aristocratic way of life is the only one that seems to me truly French; the only handsome one, commanding a wife's respect and regard; the only life that distinguishes us from the common herd; in short, the only one for which a young man should ever give up his single blessedness. In such an attitude the Comte de Manerville is an example to his age, he is superior to the general, and must be nothing less than a minister or an ambassador. He can never be ridiculous; he conquers the social advantages of a married man, and preserves the privileges of a bachelor."

"But, my good friend, I am not a de Marsay; I am, as you yourself do me the honor to express it, Paul de Manerville, neither more nor less, a good husband and father, deputy of the Centre, and perhaps some day a peer of the Upper House—altogether a very humble destiny. But I am diffident—and resigned."

"And your wife," said the merciless de Marsay, "will she be resigned?"

"My wife, my dear fellow, will do what I wish."

"Oh! my poor friend, have you not got beyond that point? Farewell, Paul. Henceforth you have forfeited my esteem. Still, one word more, for I cannot subscribe to your abdication in cold blood. Consider what is the strength of our position. If a single man had no more than six thousand francs a year, if his whole fortune lay in his reputation for elegance and the memory of his successes, well, even this

fantastic ghost has considerable value. Life still affords some chances for the bachelor 'off color.' Yes, he may still aspire to anything. But marriage! Paul, it is the 'Thus far and no further' of social existence. Once married, you can never more be anything but what you are—unless your wife condescends to take you in hand."

"But you are always crushing me under your exceptional theories!" cried Paul. "I am tired of living for the benefit of others—of keeping horses for display, of doing everything with a view to 'what people will say,' of ruining myself for fear that idiots should remark: 'Why, Paul has the same old carriage! What has he done with his money? Does he squander it? Gamble on the Bourse? Not at all; he is a millionaire. Madame So-and-so is madly in love with him. He has just had a team of horses from England, the handsomest in Paris. At Longchamps, every one remarked the four-horse chaises of Monsieur de Marsay and Monsieur de Manerville; the cattle were magnificent.' In short, the thousand idiotic remarks by which the mob of fools drives us.

"I am beginning to see that this life, in which we are simply rolled along by others instead of walking on our feet, wears us out and makes us old. Believe me, my dear Henri, I admire your powers, but I do not envy you. You are capable of judging everything; you can act and think as a statesman, you stand above general laws, received ideas, recognized prejudices, accepted conventionalities; in fact, you get all the benefits of a position in which I, for my part, should find nothing but disaster. Your cold and systematic deductions, which are perhaps quite true, are, in the eyes of the vulgar, appallingly immoral. I belong to the vulgar.

"I must play the game by the rules of the society in which I am compelled to live. You can stand on the summit of human things, on ice-peaks, and still have feelings; I should freeze there. The life of the greatest number, of which I am very frankly one, is made up of emotions such as I feel at present

in need of. The most popular lady's man often flirts with ten women at once, and wins the favor of none; and then, whatever his gifts, his practice, his knowledge of the world, a crisis may arise when he finds himself, as it were, jammed between two doors. For my part, I like the quiet and faithful intercourse of home; I want the life where a man always finds a woman at his side."

"Marriage is a little free and easy!" cried de Marsay.

Paul was not to be dashed, and went on—

"Laugh if you please; I shall be the happiest man in the world when my servant comes to say: 'Madame is waiting breakfast'—when, on coming home in the afternoon, I may find a heart——"

"You are still too frivolous, Paul! You are not moral enough yet for married life!"

"A heart to which I may confide my business and tell my secrets. I want to live with some being on terms of such intimacy that our affection may not depend on a YES or NO, or on situations where the most engaging man may disappoint passion. In short, I am bold enough to become, as you say, a good husband and a good father! I am suited to domestic happiness, and prepared to submit to the conditions insisted on by society to set up a wife, a family——"

"You suggest the idea of a beehive. Go ahead, then. You will be a dupe all your days. You mean to marry, to have a wife to yourself? In other words, you want to solve, to your own advantage, the most difficult social problem presented in our day by town life as the French Revolution has left it, so you begin by isolation! And do you suppose that your wife will be content to forego the life you condemn? Will she, like you, be disgusted with it? If you do not want to endure the conjugal joys described by your sincere friend de Marsay, listen to my last advice. Remain unmarried for thirteen years longer, and enjoy yourself to the top of your bent; then, at forty, with your first fit of the gout, marry a

widow of six-and-thirty; thus you may be happy. If you take a maid to wife, you will die a madman!"

"Indeed! And tell me why?" cried Paul, somewhat nettled.

"My dear fellow," replied de Marsay, "Boileau's '*Satire on Women*' is no more than a series of commonplace observations in verse. Why should women be faultless? Why deny them the heritage of the most obvious possession of human nature? In my opinion, the problem of marriage no longer lies in the form in which that critic discerned it. Do you really suppose that, to command affection in marriage, as in love, it is enough for a husband to be a man? You who haunt boudoirs, have you none but fortunate experiences?

"Everything in our bachelor existence prepares a disastrous mistake for the man who marries without having deeply studied the human heart. In the golden days of youth, by a singular fact in our manners, a man always bestows pleasure, he triumphs over fascinated woman, and she submits to his wishes. The obstacles set up by law and feeling, and the natural coyness of woman, give rise to a common impulse on both sides, which deludes superficial men as to their future position in the married state where there are no obstacles to be overcome, where women endure rather than allow a man's advances, and repel them rather than invite them. The whole aspect of life is altered for us. The unmarried man, free from care and always the leader, has nothing to fear from a defeat. In married life a repulse is irreparable. Though a lover may make a mistress change her mind in his favor, such a rout, my dear boy, is Waterloo to a husband. A husband, like Napoleon, is bound to gain the victory; however often he may have won, the first defeat is his overthrow. The woman who is flattered by a lover's persistency, and proud of his wrath, calls them brutal in a husband. The lover may choose his ground and do what he will, the master has no such license, and his battlefield is always the same.

"Again, the struggle is the other way about. A wife is naturally inclined to refuse what she ought ; a mistress is ready to give what she ought not.

"You who wish to marry (and who will do it), have you ever duly meditated on the Civil Code? I have never soiled my feet in that cave of commentary, that cockloft of gabble called the Law Schools ; I never looked into the Code, but I see how it works in the living organism of the world. I am a lawyer, as a clinical professor is a doctor. The malady is not in books, it is in the patient. The Code, my friend, provides women with guardians, treats them as minors, as children. And how do we manage children? By fear. In that word, my dear Paul, you have the bit for the steed. Feel your pulse, and say : Can you disguise yourself as a tyrant ; you who are so gentle, so friendly, so trusting ; you whom at first I used to laugh at, and whom I now love well enough to initiate you into my science. Yes, this is part of a science to which the Germans have already given the name of anthropology.

"Oh ! if I had not solved life by a measure of pleasure, if I had not an excessive antipathy for men who think instead of acting, if I did not despise the idiots who are so stupid as to believe that a book may live, when the sands of African deserts are composed of the ashes of I know not how many unknown Londons, Venices, Parises, and Romes now in dust, I would write a book on modern marriages and the influence of the Christian system ; I would erect a beacon on the heap of sharp stones on which the votaries lie who devote themselves to the social *multiplicamini*. And yet—is the human race worth a quarter of an hour of my time? Is not the sole rational use of pen and ink to ensnare hearts by the writing of seductive love-letters !

"So you will introduce us to the Comtesse de Manerville?"

"Perhaps," said Paul.

"We shall still be friends," said de Marsay.

"Sure?" replied Paul.

"Be quite easy; we will be very polite to you, as the Maison Rouge were to the English at Fontenoy."

Though this conversation shook him, the Comte de Manerville set to work to carry out his plans, and returned to Bordeaux for the winter of 1821. The cost at which he restored and furnished his house did credit to the reputation for elegance that had preceded him. His old connections secured him an introduction to the Royalist circle of Bordeaux, to which, indeed, he belonged, alike by opinion, name, and fortune, and he soon became the leader of its fashion. His knowledge of life, good manners, and Parisian training enchanted the Saint-Germain suburb of Bordeaux. An old marquise applied to him an expression formerly current at Court to designate the flower of handsome youth, of the dandies of a past day, whose speech and style were law; she called him *la fleur des pois*—as who should say Sweet-pea. The Liberal faction took up the nickname, which they used in irony, and the Royalists as a compliment.

Paul de Manerville fulfilled with glory the requirements of the name. He was in the position of many a second-rate actor; as soon as the public vouchsafes some approval, they become almost good. Paul, quite at his ease, displayed the qualities of his defects. His banter was neither harsh nor bitter, his manners were not haughty; in his conversation with women, he expressed the respect they value without too much deference or too much familiarity. His dandyism was no more than an engaging care for his person; he was considerate of rank; he allowed a freedom to younger men which his Paris experience kept within due limits; though a master with the sword and pistol, he was liked for his feminine gentleness. He was one of those men who are made to accept rather than give happiness, to whom woman is a great factor in life, who need understanding and encouraging, and to whom a wife's love should play the part of Providence.

Though such a character as this gives rise to trouble in domestic life, it is charming and attractive in society. Paul was a success in the narrow provincial circle, where his character, in no respect strongly marked, was better appreciated than in Paris.

The decoration of his town-house, and the necessary restoration of the Lanstrac Castle, which he fitted up with English comfort and luxury, absorbed the capital his agent had saved during the past six years. Reduced, therefore, to his exact income of forty-odd thousand francs in stocks, he thought it wise to arrange his housekeeping so as to spend no more than this. By the time he had duly displayed his carriages and horses, and entertained the young men of position in the town, he perceived that provincial life necessitated marriage. Still too young to devote himself to the avaricious cares or speculative improvements in which provincial folk ultimately find employment, as required by the need for providing for their children, he ere long felt the want of the various amusements which become the vital habit of a Parisian.

At the same time, it was not a name to be perpetuated, an heir to whom to transmit his possessions, the position to be gained by having a house where the principal families of the neighborhood might meet, nor weariness of illicit connections, that proved to be the determining cause. He had on arriving fallen in love with the queen of Bordeaux society, the much-talked-of Mademoiselle Evangelista.

Early in the century a rich Spaniard named Evangelista had settled at Bordeaux, where good introductions, added to a fine fortune, had won him a footing in the drawing-rooms of the nobility. His wife had done much to preserve him in good odor amid this aristocracy, which would not, perhaps, have been so ready to receive him but that it could thus annoy the society next below it. Madame Evangelista, descended from the illustrious house of Casa-Real, connected with the Spanish monarchs, was a creole, and, like all women accustomed to

be served by slaves, she was a very fine lady, knew nothing of the value of money, and indulged even her most extravagant fancies, finding them always supplied by a husband who was in love with her, and who was so generous as to conceal from her all the machinery of money-making. The Spaniard, delighted to find that she could be happy at Bordeaux, where his business required him to reside, bought a fine house, kept it in good style, entertained splendidly, and showed excellent taste in every respect. So, from 1800 till 1812, no one was talked of in Bordeaux but Monsieur and Madame Evangelista.

The Spaniard died in 1813, leaving a widow of two-and-thirty with an enormous fortune and the prettiest little daughter in the world, at that time eleven years old, promising to become, as indeed she became, a very accomplished person. Clever as Madame Evangelista might be, the Restoration altered her position; the Royalist party sifted itself, and several families left Bordeaux. Still, though her husband's head and hand were lacking to the management of the business, for which she showed the inaptitude of a woman of fashion and the indifference of the creole, she made no change in her mode of living.

By the time when Paul de Manerville had made up his mind to return to his native place, Mademoiselle Natalie Evangelista was a remarkably beautiful girl, and apparently the richest match in Bordeaux, where no one knew of the gradual diminution of her mother's wealth; for, to prolong her reign, Madame Evangelista had spent vast sums of money. Splendid entertainments and almost royal display had kept up the public belief in the wealth of the house.

Natalie was nearly nineteen, no offer of marriage had as yet come to her mother's ear. Accustomed to indulge all her girlish fancies, Mademoiselle Evangelista had Indian shawls and jewels, and lived amid such luxury as frightened the speculative, in a land and at a time when the young are as calculating as their parents. The fatal verdict: "Only a

prince could afford to marry Mademoiselle Evangelista," was a watchword in every drawing-room and boudoir. Mothers of families, dowagers with granddaughters to marry, and damsels jealous of the fair Natalie, whose unfailing elegance and tyrannous beauty were an annoyance to them, took care to add venom to this opinion by perfidious insinuations. When an eligible youth was heard to exclaim with rapturous admiration on Natalie's arrival at a ball—"Good heavens, what a beautiful creature!" "Yes," the mammas would reply, "but very expensive!" If some new-comer spoke of Mademoiselle Evangelista as charming, and opined that a man wanting a wife could not make a better choice—"Who would be bold enough," some one would ask, "to marry a girl to whom her mother allows a thousand francs a month for dress, who keeps horses and a lady's-maid, and wears lace? She has Mechlin lace on her dressing-gowns. What she pays for washing would keep a clerk in comfort. She has morning capes that cost six francs apiece to clean!"

Such speeches as these, constantly repeated by way of eulogium, extinguished the keenest desire a youth might feel to wed Mademoiselle Evangelista. The queen of every ball, surfeited with flattery, sure of smiles and admiration wherever she went, Natalie knew nothing of life. She lived as birds fly, as flowers bloom, finding every one about her ready to fulfill her least wish. She knew nothing of the price of things, nor of how money is acquired or kept. She very likely supposed that every house was furnished with cooks and coachmen, maids and menservants, just as a field produces fodder and trees yield fruit. To her the beggar, the pauper, the fallen tree, and the barren field were all the same thing. Cherished like a hope by her mother, fatigue never marred her pleasure; she pranced through the world like a courser on the steppes, a courser without either bridle or shoes.

Six months after Paul's arrival the upper circles of the town had brought about a meeting between "Sweet-pea" and the

queen of the ballroom. The two flowers looked at each other with apparent coldness, and thought each other charming. Madame Evangelista, as being interested in this not unforeseen meeting, read Paul's sentiments in his eyes, and said to herself: "He will be my son-in-law ;" while Paul said to himself, as he looked at Natalie: "She will be my wife!" The wealth of the Evangelistas, proverbial in Bordeaux, remained in Paul's memory as a tradition of his boyhood, the most indelible of all such impressions. And so pecuniary suitability was a foregone conclusion, without all the discussion and inquiry, which are as horrible to shy as to proud natures.

When some persons tried to express to Paul the praise which it was impossible to refuse to Natalie's manner and beauty and wit, always ending with some of the bitterly mercenary reflections as to the future to which the expensive style of the household naturally gave rise, Pease-blossom replied with the disdain that such provincialism deserves. And this way of treating the matter, which soon became known, silenced these remarks ; for it was Paul who set the *ton* in ideas and speech as much as in manners and appearance. He had imported the French development of the British stamp and its ice-bound barriers, its Byronic irony, discontent with life, contempt for sacred bonds, English plate and English wit, the scorn of old provincial customs and old property ; cigars, patent leather, the pony, lemon-covered gloves, and the trot. So that befell Paul which had happened to no one before—no old dowager or young maid tried to discourage him.

Madame Evangelista began by inviting him to several grand dinners. Could Sweet-pea remain absent from the entertainments to which the most fashionable young men of the town were bidden ? In spite of Paul's affected coldness, which did not deceive either the mother or the daughter, he found himself taking the first steps on the road to marriage. When Manerville passed in his tilbury or riding a good horse, other young men would stop to watch him, and he could hear their

comments: "There's a lucky fellow; he is rich, he is handsome, and they say he is to marry Mademoiselle Evangelista. There are some people for whom the world seems to have been made!" If he happened to meet Madame Evangelista's carriage, he was proud of the peculiar graciousness with which the mother and daughter bowed to him.

Even if Paul had not been in love with Mademoiselle Natalie, the world would have married them whether or not. The world, which is the cause of no good thing, is implicated in many disasters; then, when it sees the evil hatching out that it has so maternally brooded, it denies it and avenges it. The upper society of Bordeaux, supposing Mademoiselle Evangelista to have a fortune of a million francs, handed her over to Paul without awaiting the consent of the parties concerned—as it often does.

So the affair was settled; the magnates of the tiptop Royalist circle, when the marriage was mentioned in their presence, made such civil speeches to Paul as flattered his vanity:

"Every one says you are to marry Mademoiselle Evangelista. You will do well to marry her; you will not find so handsome a wife anywhere, not even in Paris; she is elegant, pleasing, and allied through her mother with the Casa-Reals. You will be the most charming couple; you have the same tastes, the same views of life, and will keep the most agreeable house in Bordeaux. Your wife will only have to pack up her clothes and move in. In a case like yours a house ready to live in is as good as a settlement. And you are lucky to meet with a mother-in-law like Madame Evangelista. She is a clever woman, very attractive, and will be an important aid to you in the political career to which you ought now to aspire. She has sacrificed everything for her daughter, whom she worships; and Natalie will no doubt be a good wife, for she is loving to her mother. And then, everything must have an end."

"That is all very fine," was Paul's reply; for, in love

though he was, he wished to be free to choose, "but it must have a happy end."

Paul soon became a frequent visitor to Madame Evangelista, led there by the need to find employment for his idle hours, which he, more than other men, found it difficult to fill. There only in the town did he find the magnificence and luxury to which he had accustomed himself.

Madame Evangelista, at the age of forty, was handsome still, with the beauty of a grand sunset, which in summer crowns the close of a cloudless day. Her blameless reputation was an endless subject of discussion in the "sets" of Bordeaux society, and the curiosity of women was all the more alert, because the widow's appearance suggested the sort of temperament which makes Spanish and creole women notorious. She had black eyes and hair, the foot and figure of a Spaniard—the slender serpentine figure for which the Spaniards have a name. Her face, still beautiful, had the fascinating creole complexion, which can only be described by comparing it with white lawn over warm blood-color, so equably tinted is its fairness. Her forms were round, and attractive in the grace which combines the ease of indolence with vivacity, strength with extreme freedom. She was attractive, but imposing; she fascinated, but made no promises. Being tall, she could at will assume the port and dignity of a queen.

Men were ensnared by her conversation, as birds are by bird-lime, for she had by nature the spirit which necessity bestows on intriguers; she would go on from concession to concession, arming herself with what she gained to ask for something more, but always able to withdraw a thousand yards at a bound if she were asked for anything in return. She was ignorant of facts, but she had known the Courts of Spain and of Naples, the most famous persons of the two Americas, and various illustrious families of England and of the Continent, which gave her an amount of information superficially so wide that it seemed immense.

The mother and daughter were truly friends, apart from filial and maternal feeling. They suited each other, and their perpetual contact had never resulted in a jar. Thus many persons accounted for Madame Evangelista's self-sacrifice by her love for her daughter. However, though Natalie may have consoled her mother for her unalleviated widowhood, she was not perhaps its only motive. Madame Evangelista was said to have fallen in love with a man whom the second Restoration had reinstated in his title and peerage. This man, who would willingly have married her in 1814, had very decently thrown her over in 1816.

Now Madame Evangelista, apparently the best-hearted creature living, had in her nature one terrible quality which can be best expressed in Catherine de' Medici's motto, *Odiat e aspettate*—Hate and wait. Used always to be first, always to be obeyed, she resembled royal personages in being amiable, gentle, perfectly sweet and easy-going in daily life; but terrible, implacable, when offended in her pride as a woman, a Spaniard, and a Casa-Real. She never forgave. This woman believed in the power of her own hatred; she regarded it as an evil spell which hung over her enemies. This fateful influence she had cast over the man who had been false to her. Events which seemed to prove the efficacy of her *jettatura* confirmed her in her superstitious belief in it. Though he was a minister and a member of the Upper Chamber, ruin stole upon him, and he was utterly undone. His estate, his political and personal position—all was lost. One day Madame Evangelista was able to drive past him in her handsome carriage while he stood in the Champs Élysées, and to blight him with a look sparkling with the fires of triumph.

Madame Evangelista quickly read Paul's character and concealed her own. He was the very man she hoped for as a son-in-law, as the responsible editor of her influence and authority. He was related through his mother to the Maulincours; and the old Baronne de Maulincour, the friend of the Vidame de

Pamiers, lived in the heart of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The grandson of the baronne, Auguste de Maulincour, had a brilliant position in society. Thus Paul would advantageously introduce the Evangelistas to the World of Paris. The widow had at rare intervals visited Paris under the Empire; she longed to shine in Paris under the Restoration. There only were the elements to be found of political success, the only form of fortune-making in which a woman of fashion can allow herself to coöperate.

Madame Evangelista, obliged by her husband's business to live in Bordeaux, had never liked it; she had a house there, and every one knows how many obligations fetter a woman's life under such circumstances; but she was tired of Bordeaux, she had exhausted its resources. She wished for a wider stage, as gamblers go where the play is highest. So, for her own benefit, she dreamed of high destinies for Paul. She intended to use her own cleverness and knowledge of life for her son-in-law's advancement, so as to enjoy the pleasures of power in his name. Many men are thus the screen of covert feminine ambitions. And, indeed, Madame Evangelista had more than one motive for wishing to govern her daughter's husband.

Paul was, of course, captivated by the lady, all the more certainly because she seemed not to wish to influence him in any way. She used her ascendancy to magnify herself, to magnify her daughter, and to give enhanced value to everything about her, so as to have the upper hand from the first with the man in whom she saw the means of continuing her aristocratic connection.

And Paul valued himself the more highly for this appreciation of the mother and daughter. He fancied himself wittier than he was, when he found that his remarks and his slightest jests were responded to by Mademoiselle Evangelista, who smiled or looked up intelligently, and by her mother, whose flattery always seemed to be involuntary. The two women

were so frankly kind, he felt so sure of pleasing them, they drove him so cleverly by the guiding thread of his conceit, that, before long, he spent most of his time at their house.

Within a year of his arrival Count Paul, without having declared his intentions, was so attentive to Natalie that he was universally understood to be courting her. Neither mother nor daughter seemed to think of marriage. Mademoiselle Evangelista did not depart from the reserve of a fine lady who knows how to be charming and converse agreeably without allowing the slightest advance toward intimacy. This self-respect, rare among provincial folk, attracted Paul greatly. Shy men are often touchy, unexpected suggestions alarm them. They flee even from happiness if it comes with much display, and are ready to accept unhappiness if it comes in a modest form, surrounded by gentle shades. Hence Paul, seeing that Madame Evangelista made no effort to entrap him, ensnared himself. The Spanish lady captivated him finally one evening by saying that at a certain age a superior woman, like a man, found that ambition took the place of the feelings of earlier years.

"That woman," thought Paul, as he went away, "would be capable of getting me some good embassy before I could even be elected deputy."

The man who, under any circumstances, fails to look at everything or at every idea from all sides, to examine them under all aspects, is inefficient and weak, and consequently in danger. Paul at this moment was an optimist; he saw advantages in every contingency, and never remembered that an ambitious mother-in-law may become a tyrant. So every evening as he went home he pictured himself as married, he bewitched himself, and unconsciously shod himself with the slippers of matrimony. He had enjoyed his liberty too long to regret it; he was tired of single life, which could show him nothing new, and of which he now saw only the discomforts; whereas, though the difficulties of marriage sometimes occurred

to him, he far more often contemplated its pleasures; the prospect was new to him.

"Married life," said he to himself, "is hard only on the poorer classes. Half its troubles vanish before wealth."

So every day some hopeful suggestion added to the list of advantages which he saw in this union.

"However high I may rise in life, Natalie will always be equal to her position," he would say to himself, "and that is no small merit in a wife. How many men of the Empire have I seen suffering torment from their wives! Is it not an important element of happiness never to feel one's pride or vanity rubbed the wrong way by the companion one has chosen? A man can never be utterly wretched with a well-bred woman; she never makes him contemptible, and she may be of use. Natalie will be a perfect mistress of a drawing-room."

He even endeavored to study Mademoiselle Evangelista in a way that would not compromise his ultimate decision in his own eyes, for his friend de Marsay's terrible speech rang in his ears now and again. But, in the first place, those who are accustomed to luxury have a tone of simplicity that is very deceptive. They scorn it, they use it habitually, it is the means and not the object of their lives. Paul, as he saw that these ladies' lives were so similar to his own, never for an instant imagined that they concealed any conceivable source of ruin. And then, though there are a few general rules for mitigating the worries of married life, there are none to enable us to guess or foresee them.

When troubles arise between two beings who have undertaken to make life happy and easy each for the other, they are based on the friction produced by an incessant intimacy which does not arise between two persons before marriage, and never can arise till the laws and habits of French life are changed. Two beings on the eve of joining their lives always deceive each other; but the deception is innocent and involuntary.

Each, of course, stands in the best light ; they are rivals as to which makes the most promising show, and at that time form a favorable idea of themselves up to which they cannot afterward come. Real life, like a changeable day, consists more often of the gray, dull hours when Nature is overcast than of the brilliant intervals when the sun gives glory and joy to the fields. Young people look only at the fine days. Subsequently they ascribe the inevitable troubles of life to matrimony, for there is in man a tendency to seek the cause of his griefs in things or persons immediately at hand.

To discover in Mademoiselle Evangelista's demeanor or countenance, in her words or her gestures, any indication that might reveal the quota of imperfection inherent in her character, Paul would have needed not merely the science of Lavater and of Gall, but another kind of knowledge for which no code of formulas exists, the personal intuition of the observer, which requires almost universal knowledge. Like all girls, Natalie's countenance was impenetrable. The deep, serene peace given by sculptors to the virgin heads intended to personify Justice, Innocence, all the divinities who dwell above earthly agitations—this perfect calm is the greatest charm of a girlish face, it is the sign-manual of her purity ; nothing has stirred her, no repressed passion, no betrayed affection has cast a shade on the placidity of her features ; and if it is assumed, the girl has ceased to exist. Living always inseparable from her mother, Natalie, like every Spanish woman, had had none but religious teaching, and some few lessons of a mother to her daughter which might be useful for her part in life. Hence her calm expression was natural ; but it was a veil, in which the woman was shrouded as a butterfly is in the chrysalis.

At the same time, a man skilled in the use of the scalpel of analysis might have discerned in Natalie some revelation of the difficulties her character might present in the conflict of married or social life. Her really wonderful beauty was

marked by excessive regularity of features, in perfect harmony with the proportions of her head and figure. Such perfection does not promise well for the intellect, and there are few exceptions to this rule. Superior qualities show in some slight imperfections of form which become exquisitely attractive, points of light where antagonistic feelings sparkle and rivet the eye. Perfect harmony indicates the coldness of a compound nature.

Natalie had a round figure, a sign of strength, but also an infallible evidence of self-will often reaching the pitch of obstinacy in women whose mind is neither keen nor broad. Her hands, like those of a Greek statue, confirmed the forecast of her face and form by showing a love of unreasoning dominion. Will for will's sake. Her eyebrows met in the middle, which, according to observers, indicates a jealous disposition. The jealousy of noble souls becomes emulation and leads to great things; that of mean minds turns to hatred. Her mother's motto, *Odiat e aspettate*, was hers in all its strength. Her eyes looked black, but were in fact dark hazel-brown, and contrasted with her hair of that russet hue, so highly prized by the Romans, and known in English as auburn, the usual color of the hair in the children of two black-haired parents like Monsieur and Madame Evangelista. Her delicately white skin added infinitely to the charm of this contrast of colors in hair and eyes, but this refinement was purely superficial; for whenever the lines of a face have not a peculiar soft roundness, whatever the refinement and delicacy of the details, do not look for any especial charms of mind. These flowers of delusive youth presently fade, and you are surprised after the lapse of a few years to detect hardness, sternness, where you once admired the elegance of lofty qualities.

There was something august in Natalie's features; still, her chin was rather heavy—a painter would have said thick in *impasto*, an expression descriptive of a type that shows pre-

existing sentiments of which the violence does not declare itself till middle life. Her mouth, a little sunk in her face, showed the arrogance no less expressed in her hand, her chin, her eyebrows, and her stately shape. Finally, a last sign which alone might have warned the judgment of a connoisseur, Natalie's pure and fascinating voice had a metallic ring. However gently the brazen instrument was handled, however tenderly the vibrations were sent through the curves of the horn, that voice proclaimed a nature like that of the Duke of Alva, from whom the Casa-Reals were collaterally descended. All these indications pointed to passions, violent but not tender, to sudden infatuations, irreconcilable hatred, a certain wit without intellect, and the craving to rule, inherent in persons who feel themselves below the pretensions.

These faults, the outcome of race and constitution, sometimes compensated for by the impulsions of generous blood, were hidden in Natalie as ore is hidden in the mine, and would only be brought to the surface by the rough treatment and shocks to which character is subjected in the world. At present the sweetness and freshness of youth, the elegance of her manners, her saintly ignorance, and the grace of girlhood, tinged her features with the delicate veneer that ever deceives superficial observers.

How should Paul, who loved as a man does when love is seconded by desire, foresee in a girl of this temper, whose beauty dazzled him, the woman as she would be at thirty, when shrewder observers might have been deceived by appearances? If happiness were difficult to find in married life, with this girl it would not be impossible. Some fine qualities shone through her defects. In the hand of a skillful master any good quality may be made to stifle faults, especially in a girl who can love.

But to make so stern a metal ductile, the iron fist of which de Marsay had spoken was needed. The Paris dandy was right. Fear, inspired by love, is an infallible tool for dealing

with a woman's spirit. Those who fear, love ; and fear is more nearly akin to love than to hatred. Would Paul have the coolness, the judgment, the firmness needed in the contest of which no wife should be allowed to have a suspicion? And, again, did Natalie love Paul?

Natalie, like most girls, mistook for love the first impulses of instinct and liking that Paul's appearance stirred in her, knowing nothing of the meaning of marriage or of housewifery. To her the Comte de Manerville, who had seen diplomatic service at every court in Europe, one of the most fashionable men of Paris, could not be an ordinary man devoid of moral strength, with a mixture of bravery and shyness, energetic perhaps in adversity, but defenseless against the foes that poison happiness. Would she develop tact enough to discern Paul's good qualities among his superficial defects? Would she not magnify these and forget those, after the manner of young wives who know nothing of life?

At a certain age a woman will overlook vice in the man who spares her petty annoyances, while she regards such annoyances as misfortunes. What conciliatory influence and what experience would cement and enlighten this young couple? Would not Paul and his wife imagine that love was all-in-all, when they were only at the stage of affectionate grimacing in which young wives indulge at the beginning of their life, and of the compliments a husband pays on their return from a ball while he still has the courtesy of admiration?

In such a situation would not Paul succumb to his wife's tyranny instead of asserting his authority? Would he be able to say "No?" All was danger for a weak man in circumstances where a strong one might perhaps have run some risk.

The subject of this study is not the transition of an unmarried to a married man—a picture which, broadly treated,

would not lack the interest which the innermost storm of our feelings must lend to the commonest facts of life. The events and ideas which culminated in Paul's marriage to Mademoiselle Evangelista are an introduction to the work, and only intended as a study to the great comedy which is the prologue to every married life. Hitherto this passage has been neglected by dramatic writers, though it offers fresh resources to their wit.

This prologue, which decided Paul's future life, and to which Madame Evangelista looked forward with terror, was the discussion to which the marriage-settlements give rise in every family, whether of the nobility or of the middle-class; for human passions are quite as strongly agitated by small interests as by great ones. These dramas, played out in the presence of the notary, are all more or less like this one, and its real interest will be less in these pages than in the memory of most married people.

Early in the winter of 1822 Paul de Manerville, through the intervention of his grand-aunt, Madame la Baronne de Maulincour, asked the hand of Mademoiselle Evangelista. Though the baroness usually spent no more than two months in Médoc, she remained on this occasion till the end of October to be of use to her grand-nephew in this matter, and play the part of a mother. After laying the overtures before Madame Evangelista, the experienced old lady came to report to Paul on the results of this step.

"My boy," said she, "I have settled the matter. In discussing money matters I discovered that Madame Evangelista gives her daughter nothing. Mademoiselle Natalie marries with but her barest rights. Marry, my dear; men who have a name and estates to transmit must sooner or later end by marriage. I should like to see my dear Auguste do the same.

"You can get married without me, I have nothing to bestow on you but my blessing, and old women of my age have no business at weddings. I shall return to Paris to-morrow.

When you introduce your wife to society, I shall see her much more comfortably than I can here. If you had not your house in Paris, you would have found a home with me. I should have been delighted to arrange my third-floor rooms to suit you."

"Dear aunt," said Paul, "I thank you very warmly. But what do you mean by saying her mother gives her nothing, and that she marries only with her bare rights?"

"Her mother, my dear boy, is a very knowing hand, who is taking advantage of the girl's beauty to make terms and give you no more than what she cannot keep back—the father's fortune. We old folk, you know, think a deal deal of 'How much has he? How much has she?' I advise you to give strict instructions to your notary. The marriage-contract, my child, is a sacred duty. If your father and mother had not made their bed well, you might now be without sheets. You will have children—they are the usual result of marriage—so you are bound to think of this. Call in Maître Mathias, our old notary."

Madame de Maulincour left Paul plunged in perplexity. His mother-in-law was a knowing hand! He must discuss and defend his interests in the marriage-contract! Who, then, proposed to attack them? So he took his aunt's advice and intrusted the matter of settlements to Maître Mathias.

Still, he could not help thinking of the anticipated discussion. And it was not without much trepidation that he went to see Madame Evangelista with a view to announcing his intentions. Like all timid people, he was afraid lest he should betray the distrust suggested by his aunt, which he thought nothing less than insulting. To avoid the slightest friction with so imposing a personage as his future mother-in-law seemed, he fell back on the circumlocutions natural to those who dare not face a difficulty.

"Madame, you know what an old family notary is like," said he, when Natalie was absent for a minute. "Mine is a

worthy old man, who would be deeply aggrieved if I did not place my marriage-contract in his hands——”

“But, my dear fellow,” said Madame Evangelista, interrupting him, “are not marriage-contracts always settled through the notaries on each side?”

During the interval while Paul sat pondering, not daring to open the matter, Madame Evangelista had been wondering, “What is he thinking about?” for women have a great power of reading thought from the play of feature. And she could guess at the great-aunt’s hints from the embarrassed gaze and agitated tone which betrayed Paul’s mental disturbance.

“At last,” thought she, “the decisive moment has come; the crisis is at hand; what will be the end of it? My notary,” she went on, after a pause, “is Maître Solonet, and yours is Maître Mathias; I will ask them both to dinner to-morrow, and they can settle the matter between them. Is it not their business to conciliate our interests without our meddling, as it is that of the cook to feed us well?”

“Why, of course,” said he, with a little sigh of relief.

By a strange inversion of parts, Paul, who was blameless, quaked, while Madame Evangelista, though dreadfully anxious, appeared calm. The widow owed her daughter the third of the fortune left by Monsieur Evangelista, twelve hundred thousand francs, and was quite unable to pay it, even if she stripped herself of all her possessions. She would be at her son-in-law’s mercy. Though she might override Paul alone, would Paul, enlightened by his lawyer, agree to any compromise as to the account of her stewardship? If he withdrew, all Bordeaux would know the reason, and it would be impossible for Natalie to marry. The mother who wished to secure her daughter’s happiness, the woman who from the hour of her birth had lived in honor, foresaw the day when she must be dishonored.

Like those great generals who would fain wipe out of their lives the moment when they were cowards at heart, she wished

she could score out that day from the days of her life. And certainly some of her hairs turned white in the course of the night when, face to face with this difficulty, she bitterly blamed herself for her want of care.

In the first place, she was obliged to confide in her lawyer, whom she sent for to attend her as soon as she was up. She had to confess a secret vexation which she had never admitted even to herself, for she had walked on to the verge of the precipice, trusting to one of those chances that never happen. And a feeling was born in her soul, a little animus against Paul that was not yet hatred, nor aversion, nor in any way evil—but, was not he the antagonistic party in this family suit? Was he not, unwittingly, an innocent enemy who must be defeated? And who could ever love any one he had duped?

Compelled to deceive, the Spanish woman resolved, like any woman, to show her superiority in a contest of which the entire success could alone wipe out the discredit. In the silence of the night she excused herself by a line of argument in which her pride had the upper hand. Had not Natalie benefited by her lavishness? Had her conduct ever been actuated by one of the base and ignoble motives that degrade the soul? She could not keep accounts—well, was that a sin, a crime? Was not a man only too lucky to win such a wife as Natalie? Was not the treasure she had preserved for him worth a discharge in full? Did not many a man pay for the woman he loved by making great sacrifices? And why should he do more for a courtesan than for a wife? Beside, Paul was a commonplace, incapable being; she would support him by the resources of her own cleverness; she would help him to make his way in the world; he would owe his position to her; would not this amply pay the debt? He would be a fool to hesitate? And for a few thousand francs more or less? It would be disgraceful!

“If I am not at once successful,” said she to herself, “I



THE YOUNG MAN ARRIVED NEXT MORNING.

leave Bordeaux. I can still secure a good match for Natalie by realizing all that is left—the house, my diamonds, and the furniture, giving her all but an annuity for myself."

When a strongly tempered spirit plans a retreat, as Richelieu did at Brouage, and schemes for a splendid finale, this alternative becomes a fulcrum which helps the schemer to triumph. This escape, in case of failure, reassured Madame Evangelista, who went to sleep, indeed, full of confidence in her second in this duel. She trusted greatly to the aid of the cleverest notary in Bordeaux, Maître Solonet, a young man of seven-and-twenty, a member of the Legion of Honor as the reward of having contributed actively to the restoration of the Bourbons. Proud and delighted to be admitted to an acquaintance with Madame Evangelista, less as a lawyer than as belonging to the Rôyalist party in Bordeaux, Solonet cherished for her sunset beauty one of those passions which such women as Madame Evangelista ignore while they are flattered by them, and which even the prudish allow to float in their wake. Solonet lived in an attitude of vanity full of respect and seemly attentions. This young man arrived next morning with the zeal of a slave, and was admitted to the widow's bedroom, where he found her coquettishly dressed in a most becoming wrapper.

"Now," said she, "can I trust to your reticence and entire devotion in the discussion which is to take place this evening? Of course, you can guess that my daughter's marriage-contract is in question."

The young lawyer was profuse in protestations.

"For the facts, then," said she.

"I am all attention," he replied, with a look of concentration.

Madame Evangelista stated the case without any finesse.

"My dear madame, all this matters not," said Maître Solonet, assuming an important air when his client had laid the exact figures before him. "How have you dealt with Mon-

sieur de Manerville? The moral attitude is of greater consequence than any questions of law or finance."

Madame Evangelista robed herself in dignity; the young notary was delighted to learn that to this day his client, in her treatment of Paul, had preserved the strictest distance; half out of real pride and half out of unconscious self-interest, she had always behaved to the Comte de Manerville as though he were her inferior, and it would be an honor for him to marry Mademoiselle Evangelista. Neither she nor her daughter could be suspected of interested motives; their feelings were evidently free from meanness; if Paul should raise the least difficulty on the money question, they had every right to withdraw to an immeasurable distance—in fact, she had a complete ascendancy over her would-be son-in-law.

"This being the case," said Solonet, "what is the utmost concession you are inclined to make?"

"The least possible," said she, laughing.

"A woman's answer!" replied Solonet. "Madame, do you really wish to see Mademoiselle Natalie married?"

"Yes."

"And you want a discharge for the eleven hundred and fifty-six thousand francs you will owe her in accordance with the account rendered of your guardianship?"

"Exactly!"

"How much do you wish to reserve?"

"At least thirty thousand francs a year."

"So we must conquer or perish?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will consider the ways and means of achieving that end, for we must be very dexterous and husband our resources. I will give you a few hints on arriving; act on them exactly, and I can confidently predict complete success. Is Count Paul in love with Mademoiselle Natalie?" he asked as he rose.

"He worships her."

"That is not enough. Is he so anxious to have her as his wife that he will pass over any little pecuniary difficulties?"

"Yes."

"That is what I call having personal property in a daughter!" exclaimed the notary. "Make her look her best this evening," he added, with a cunning twinkle.

"We have a perfect dress for her."

"The dress for the contract, in my opinion, is half the settlements," said Solonet.

This last argument struck Madame Evangelista as so cogent that she insisted on helping her daughter to dress, partly to superintend the toilet, but also to secure her as an innocent accomplice in her financial plot. And her daughter, with her hair like la Sévigné's, and a white cashmere dress with rose-colored bows, seemed to her handsome enough to assure the victory.

When the maid had left them, and Madame Evangelista was sure that nobody was within hearing, she arranged her daughter's curls as a preliminary.

"My dear child, are you sincerely attached to Monsieur de Manerville?" said she in a steady voice.

The mother and daughter exchanged a strangely meaning glance.

"Why, my little mother, should you ask to-day rather than yesterday? Why have you allowed me to imagine a doubt?"

"If it were to part you from me for ever, would you marry him all the same?"

"I could give him up without dying of grief."

"Then you do not love him, my dear," said the mother, kissing her daughter's forehead.

"But why, my dear mamma, are you playing the grand inquisitor?"

"I wanted to see if you cared to be married without being madly in love with your husband."

"I like him."

"You are right; he is a count, and, between us, he shall be made peer of France. But there will be difficulties."

"Difficulties between people who care for each other? No! This Sweet-pea, my mother, is too well planted there," and she pointed to her heart with a pretty gesture, "to make the smallest objection; I am sure of that."

"But if it were not so?"

"I should utterly forget him."

"Well said! You are a Casa-Real. But though he is madly in love with you, if certain matters were discussed which do not immediately concern him, but which he would have to make the best of for your sake and mine, Natalie, eh? If, without proceeding in the least too far, a little graciousness of manner might turn the scale? A mere nothing, you know, a word? Men are like that—they can resist sound argument and yield to a glance."

"I understand! A little touch just to make Favorite leap the gate," said Natalie with a flourish as if she were whipping a horse.

"My darling, I do not wish you to do anything approaching to invitation. We have traditions of old Castilian pride which will never allow us to go too far. The count will be informed of my situation."

"What situation?"

"You would not understand if I told you. Well, if after seeing you in all your beauty his eye should betray the slightest hesitancy—and I shall watch him—at that instant I should break the whole thing off; I should turn everything into money, leave Bordeaux, and go to Douai, to the Claes, who, after all, are related to us through the Temnincks. Then I would find a French peer for your husband, even if I had to take refuge in a convent and give you my whole fortune."

"My dear mother, what can I do to hinder such misfortunes?" said Natalie.

"I never saw you lovelier, my child ! Be a little purposely attractive, and all will be well."

Madame Evangelista left Natalie pensive, and went to achieve a toilet which allowed her to stand a comparison with her daughter. If Natalie was to fascinate Paul, must not she herself fire the enthusiasm of her champion Solonet ?

The mother and daughter were armed for conquest when Paul arrived with the bouquet which for some months past had been his daily offering to Natalie. Then they sat chatting while awaiting the lawyers.

This day was to Paul the first skirmish in the long and weary warfare of married life. It is necessary, therefore, to review the forces on either side, to place the belligerents, and to define the field on which they are to do battle.

To second him in a struggle of which he did not in the least appreciate the consequences, Paul had nobody but his old lawyer Mathias. They were each to be surprised unarmed by an unexpected manœuvre, driven by an enemy whose plans were laid, and compelled to act without having time for reflection. What man but would have failed even with Cujas and Barthole to back him ? How should he fear perfidy when everything seemed so simple and natural ?

What could Mathias do single-handed against Madame Evangelista, Solonet, and Natalie, especially when his client was a lover who would go over to the enemy as soon as his happiness should seem to be imperiled ? Paul was already entangling himself by making the pretty speeches customary with lovers, to which his passion gave an emphasis of immense value in the eyes of Madame Evangelista, who was leading him on to commit himself.

The matrimonial *condottieri* (mercenary soldiers), who were about to do battle for their clients, and whose personal prowess would prove decisive in this solemn contest—the two notaries—represented the old and the new schools, the old and the new style of notary.

Maître Mathias was a worthy old man of sixty-nine, proud of twenty years' practice in his office. His broad, gouty feet were shod in shoes with silver buckles, and were an absurd finish to legs so thin, with such prominent knee-bones, that when he crossed his feet they looked like the cross-bones on a tombstone. His lean thighs, lost in baggy, black knee-breeches with silver buckles, seemed to bend under the weight of a burly stomach and the round shoulders characteristic of men who live in an office; a huge ball, always clothed in a green coat with square-cut skirts, which no one remembered ever to have seen new. His hair, tightly combed back and powdered, was tied in a rat's-tail that always tucked itself away between the collar of his coat and that of his flowered white vest. With his bullet head, his face as red as a vine-leaf, his blue eyes, trumpet-nose, thick lips, and double-chin, the dear little man, wherever he went, aroused the laughter so liberally bestowed by the French on the grotesque creations which Nature sometimes allows herself and Art thinks it funny to exaggerate, calling them caricatures.

But in Maître Mathias the mind had triumphed over the body, the qualities of the soul had vanquished the eccentricity of his appearance. Most of the townsfolk treated him with friendly respect and deference full of esteem. The notary's voice won all hearts by the eloquent ring of honesty. His only cunning consisted in going straight to the point, over-setting every evil thought by the directness of his questions. His sharply observant eye, and his long experience of business, gave him that spirit of divination which allowed him to read consciences and discern the most secret thoughts. Though grave and quiet in business, this patriarch had the cheerfulness of our ancestors. He might, one felt, risk a song at table, accept and keep up family customs, celebrate anniversaries and birthdays, whether of grandparents or children, and burn the Christmas log with due ceremony; he loved to give New Year's gifts, to invent surprises, and bring

out Easter eggs; he believed, no doubt, in the duties of a godfather, and would never neglect any old-time custom that gave color to life of yore.

Maitre Mathias was a noble and a respectable survival of the notaries, obscure men of honor, of whom no receipt was asked for millions, and who returned them in the same bags, tied with the same string; who fulfilled every trust to the letter, drew up inventories for probate with decent feeling, took a paternal interest in their clients' affairs, put a bar sometimes in the way of a spendthrift, and were the depositories of family secrets; in short, one of those notaries who considered themselves responsible for blunders in their deeds, and who gave time and thought to them. Never, in the whole of his career as a notary, had one of his clients to complain of a bad investment, of a mortgage ill-chosen or carelessly managed. His wealth, slowly but honestly acquired, had been accumulated through thirty years of industry and economy. He had found places for fourteen of his clerks. Religious and generous in secret, Mathias was always to be found where good was to be done without reward. He was an acting member of the Board of Asylums and the Charitable Committee, and the largest subscriber to the voluntary taxes for relief of unexpected disaster, or the establishment of some useful institution. Thus, neither he nor his wife had a carriage; his word was sacred; he had as much money deposited in his cellar as lay at the bank; he was known as "Good Monsieur Mathias;" and when he died, three thousand persons followed him to the grave.

Solonet was the youthful notary who comes in humming a tune, who affects an airy manner, and declares that business may be done quite as efficiently with a laugh as with a serious countenance; the notary who is a captain in the National Guard, who does not like to be known for a lawyer, and aims at the cross of the Legion of Honor, who keeps his carriage and leaves the correcting of his deeds to his clerks; the notary

who goes to balls and to the play, who buys pictures and plays *écarté*, who has a cash drawer into which he pours deposit-money, repaying in notes what he receives in gold ; the notary who keeps pace with the times and risks his capital in doubtful investments, who speculates, hoping to retire with an income of thirty thousand francs after ten years in his office ; the notary whose acumen is the outcome of duplicity, and who is feared by many as an accomplice in possession of their secrets ; the notary who regards his official position as a means of marrying some blue-stocking heiress.

When the fair and elegant Solonet—all curled and scented, booted like a lover of the Vaudeville, and dressed like a dandy whose most important business is a duel—entered the room before his older colleague, who walked slowly from a touch of the gout, the two were the living representatives of one of the caricatures entitled “Then and Now,” which had great success under the Empire.

Though Madame and Mademoiselle Evangelista, to whom “Good Monsieur Mathias” was a stranger, at first felt a slight inclination to laugh, they were at once touched by the perfect grace of his greeting. The worthy man’s speech was full of the amenity that an amiable old man can infuse both into what he says and the manner of saying it.

The younger man, with his frothy sparkle, was at once thrown into the shade. Mathias showed his superior breeding by the measured respect of his address to Paul. Without humiliating his white hairs, he recognized the young man’s rank, while appreciating the fact that certain honors are due to old age, and that all such social rights are interdependent. Solonet’s bow and “How d’ye do?” were, on the contrary, the utterance of perfect equality, which could not fail to offend the susceptibilities of a man of the world, and to make himself ridiculous in the eyes of a man of rank.

The young notary, by a somewhat familiar gesture, invited Madame Evangelista to speak with him in a window-recess.

For some few minutes they spoke in whispers, laughing now and then, no doubt to mislead the others as to the importance of the conversation, in which Maître Solonet communicated the plan of battle to the lady in command.

"And could you really," said he in conclusion, "make up your mind to sell your house?"

"Undoubtedly!" said she.

Madame Evangelista did not choose to tell her lawyer her reasons for such heroism, as he thought it, for Solonet's zeal might have cooled if he had known that his client meant to leave Bordeaux. She had not even said so to Paul, not wishing to alarm him prematurely by the extent of the circumvallations needed for the first outworks of a political position.

After dinner the plenipotentiaries left the lovers with Madame Evangelista, and went into an adjoining room to discuss business. Thus two dramas were being enacted: by the chimney-corner in the drawing-room a love scene in which life smiled bright and happy; in the study a serious duologue, in which interest was laid bare, and already played the part it always fills under the most flowery, cloudless, and summer-like aspects of life.

"My dear sir, the deed will be in your hands; I know what I owe to my senior." Mathias bowed gravely. "But," Solonet went on, unfolding a rough draft, of no use whatever, that a clerk had written out, "as we are the weaker party, as we are the spinster, I have drafted the articles to save you the trouble. We propose to marry with all our rights on a footing of possession in common, an unqualified settlement of all estate, real and personal, each on the other in case of decease without issue; or, if issue survive them, a settlement of one-quarter on the surviving parent, and a life-interest in one-quarter more. The sum thrown into common stock to be one-quarter of the estate of each contracting party, the survivor to have all furniture and movables without exception and duty free. It is all as plain as day."

"Ta, ta, ta, ta," said Mathias, "I do not do business as you would sing a ballad. What have you to show?"

"What on your side?" asked Solonet.

"We have to settle," said Mathias, "the estate of Lanstrac, producing twenty-three thousand francs a year in rents, to say nothing of produce in kind: *Item*: the farms of le Grassol and le Guadet, each let for three thousand six hundred francs. *Item*: the vineyards of Bellerose, yielding on an average sixteen thousand—together forty-six thousand two hundred francs a year. *Item*: a family mansion at Bordeaux, assessed at nine hundred. *Item*: a fine house in Paris, with a forecourt and garden, Rue de la Pépinière, assessed at fifteen hundred. These properties, of which I hold the title-deeds, we inherit from our parents, excepting the house in Paris acquired by purchase. We have also to include the furniture of the two houses and of the castle at Lanstrac, valued at four hundred and fifty thousand francs. There you have the table, the cloth, and the first course. Now what have you for the second course and the dessert?"

"Our rights and expectations," said Solonet.

"Specify, my dear sir," replied Mathias. "What have you to show? Where is the valuation made at Monsieur Evangelista's death? Show me your valuations, and the investments you hold. Where is your capital—if you have any? Where is your land—if you have land? Show me your guardian's accounts, and tell us what your mother gives or promises to give you."

"Is Monsieur le Comte de Manerville in love with Mademoiselle Evangelista?"

"He means to marry her if everything proves suitable," said the old notary. "I am not a child; this is a matter of business and not of sentiment."

"The business will fall through if you have no sentiment—and generous sentiment; and this is why," said Solonet. "We had no valuation made after our husband's death.

Spanish, and a creole, we knew nothing of French law. And we were too deeply grieved to think of the petty formalities which absorb colder hearts. It is a matter of public notoriety that the deceased gentleman adored his wife, and that we were plunged in woe. Though we had a probate and a kind of valuation on a general estimate, you may thank the surrogate guardian for that, who called upon us to make a statement and settle a sum upon our daughter as best we might just at a time when we were obliged to sell out of the English Funds to an enormous amount which we wished to reinvest in Paris at double the interest."

"Come, do not talk nonsense to me. There are means of checking these amounts. How much did you pay in succession duties? The figure will be enough to verify the amounts. Go to the facts. Tell us plainly how much you had, and what is left. And then, if we are too desperately in love, we shall see."

"Well, if you are marrying for money, you may make your bow at once. We may lay claim to more than a million francs; but our mother has nothing of it left but this house and furniture and four hundred odd thousand francs, invested in 1817 in five per cents., and bringing in forty thousand francs a year."

"How then do you keep up a style costing a hundred thousand?" cried Mathias in dismay.

"Our daughter has cost us vast sums. Beside, we like display. And, finally, all your jeremiads will not bring back two sous of it."

"Mademoiselle Natalie might have been very handsomely brought up on the fifty thousand francs a year that belonged to her without rushing into ruin. And if you ate with such an appetite as a girl, what will you not devour when you become a wife?"

"Let us go then," said Solonet. "The handsomest girl alive is bound to spend more than she has."

"I will go and speak two words to my client," said the older lawyer.

"Go, go," thought Maître Solonet. "Go, old Father Cassandra, and tell your client we have not a centime." For, in the silence of his private office, he had strategically disposed of his masses, formed his arguments in columns, fixed the turning-points of the discussion, and prepared the critical moment when the antagonistic parties, thinking all was lost, would jump at a compromise which would be the triumph of his client.

The flowing dress with pink ribbons, the ringlets *à la Sévigné*, Natalie's small foot, her insinuating looks, her slender hand, constantly engaged in rearranging the curls which did not need it—all the tricks of a girl showing off, as a peacock spreads its tail in the sun—had brought Paul to the point at which her mother wished to see him. He was crazy with admiration, as crazy as a schoolboy for a courtesan; his looks, an unfailing thermometer of the mind, marked the frenzy of passion which leads a man to commit a thousand follies.

"Natalie is so beautiful," he whispered to Madame Evangelista, "that I can understand the madness which drives us to pay for pleasure by death."

The lady tossed her head.

"A lover's words!" she replied. "My husband never made me such fine speeches; but he married me penniless, and never in thirteen years gave me an instant's pain."

"Is that a hint for me?" said Paul, smiling.

"You know how truly I care for you, dear boy," said she, pressing his hand. "Beside, do you not think I must love you well to be willing to give you my Natalie?"

"To give me! To give me!" cried the girl, laughing and waving a fan of Indian feathers. "What are you whispering about?"

"I," said Paul, "was saying how well I love you—since the proprieties forbid my expressing my hopes to you."

"Why?"

"I am afraid of myself."

"Oh! you are too clever not to know how to set the gems of flattery. Would you like me to tell you what I think of you? Well, you seem to me to have more wit than a man in love should show. To be Sweet-pea and at the same time very clever," said she, looking down, "seems to me an unfair advantage. A man ought to choose between the two. I, too, am afraid."

"Of what?"

"We will not talk like this. Do not you think, mother, that there is danger in such a conversation when the contract is not yet signed?"

"But it will be," said Paul.

"I should very much like to know what Achilles and Nestor are saying to each other," said Natalie, with a glance of child-like curiosity at the door of the adjoining room.

"They are discussing our children, our death, and I know not what trifles beside," said Paul. "They are counting out our crown-pieces, to tell us whether we may have five horses in the stable. And they are considering certain deeds of gift, but I have forestalled them there."

"How?" said Natalie.

"Have I not given you myself wholly and all I have?" said he, looking at the girl, who was handsomer than ever as the blush brought up by her pleasure at this reply mounted to her cheeks.

"Mother, how am I to repay such generosity?"

"My dear child, is not your life before you? If you make him happy every day, is not that a gift of inexhaustible treasures? I had no other fortune."

"Do you like Lanstrac?" asked Paul.

"How can I fail to like anything that is yours?" said she.

"And I should like to see your house."

"Our house," said Paul. "You want to see whether I

have anticipated your tastes, if you can be happy there? Your mother has made your husband's task a hard one; you have always been so happy; but when love is infinite, nothing is impossible."

"Dear children," said Madame Evangelista, "do you think you can remain in Bordeaux during the early days of your marriage? If you feel bold enough to face the world that knows you, watches you, criticises you—well and good! But if you both have that coyness which dwells in the soul and finds no utterance, we will go to Paris, where the life of a young couple is lost in the torrent. There only can you live like lovers without fear of ridicule."

"You are right, mother; I had not thought of it. But I shall hardly have time to get the house ready. I will write this evening to de Marsay, a friend on whom I can rely, to hurry on the workmen."

At the very moment when, like all young men who are accustomed to gratify their wishes without any preliminary reflection, Paul was recklessly pledging himself to the expenses of a residence in Paris, Maître Mathias came into the room and signed to his client to come and speak with him.

"What is it, my good friend?" said Paul, allowing himself to be led aside.

"Monsieur le Comte," said the worthy man, "the lady has not a sou. My advice is to put off this discussion till another day to give you the opportunity of acting with propriety."

"Monsieur Paul," said Natalie, "I also should like a private word with you."

Though Madame Evangelista's face was calm, no Jew in the Dark Ages ever suffered greater martyrdom in his caldron of boiling oil than she in her violet velvet dress. Solonet had pledged himself to the marriage, but she knew not by what means and conditions he meant to succeed, and she endured the most dreadful anguish of alternative courses. She

really owed her triumph, perhaps, to her daughter's disobedience.

Natalie had put her own interpretation on her mother's words, for she could not fail to see her uneasiness. When she perceived the effect of her advances, her mind was torn by a thousand contradictory thoughts. Without criticising her mother, she felt half ashamed of this manœuvring, of which the result was obviously to be some definite advantage. Then she was seized by a very intelligible sort of jealous curiosity. She wanted to ascertain whether Paul loved her well enough to overlook the difficulties her mother had alluded to, and of which the existence was proved by Maître Mathias' cloudy brow. These feelings prompted her to an impulse of honesty which, in fact, became her well. The blackest perfidy would have been less dangerous than her innocence was.

"Paul," said she in an undertone, and it was the first time she had addressed him by his name, "if some difficulties of money matters could divide us, understand that I release you from every pledge, and give you leave to ascribe to me all the blame that could arise from such a separation."

She spoke with such perfect dignity in the expression of her generosity that Paul believed in her disinterestedness and her ignorance of the fact which the notary had just communicated to him; he pressed the girl's hand, kissing it like a man to whom love is far dearer than money.

Natalie left the room.

"Bless me! Monsieur le Comte, you are committing great follies," growled the old notary, rejoining his client.

But Paul stood pensive; he had expected to have an income of about a hundred thousand francs by uniting his fortune and Natalie's; and however blindly in love a man may be, he does not drop without a pang from a hundred thousand to forty-six thousand francs a year when he marries a woman accustomed to every luxury.

"My daughter then is gone," said Madame Evangelista,

advancing with royal dignity to where Paul and the notary were standing. "Can you not tell me what is going on!"

"Madame," said Mathias, dismayed by Paul's silence, and forced to break the ice, "an impediment—a delay——"

On this, Maître Solonet came out of the inner room and interrupted his senior with a speech that restored Paul to life. Overwhelmed by the recollection of his own devoted speeches and lover-like attitude, Paul knew not how to withdraw or to modify them; he only longed to fling himself into some yawning gulf.

"There is a way of releasing Madame Evangelista from her debt to her daughter," said the young lawyer with airy ease. "Madame Evangelista holds securities for forty thousand francs yearly in five per cents.; the capital will soon be at par, if not higher; we may call it eight hundred thousand francs. This house and garden are worth certainly two hundred thousand. Granting this, madame may, under the marriage-contract, transfer the securities and title-deeds to her daughter, reserving only the life-interest, for I cannot suppose that the count wishes to leave his mother-in-law penniless. Though madame has spent her own fortune, she will thus restore her daughter's, all but a trifling sum."

"Women are most unfortunate when they do not understand business," said Madame Evangelista. "I have securities and title-deeds? What in the world are they?"

Paul was enraptured as he heard this proposal. The old lawyer, seeing the snare spread and his client with one foot already caught in it, stood petrified, saying to himself—

"I believe we are being tricked!"

"If madame takes my advice, she will at least secure peace," the younger man went on. "If she sacrifices herself, at least she will not be worried by the young people. Who can foresee who will live or die? Monsieur le Comte will then sign a release for the whole sum due to Mademoiselle Evangelista out of her father's fortune."

Mathias could not conceal the wrath that sparkled in his eyes and crimsoned his face.

"A sum of——?" he asked, trembling with indignation.

"Of one million one hundred and fifty-six thousand francs, according to the deed——"

"Why do you not ask Monsieur le Comte *hic et nunc* (here and now) to renounce all claims on his wife's fortune?" said Mathias. "It would be more straightforward. Well, Monsieur le Comte de Manerville's ruin shall not be accomplished under my eyes. I beg to withdraw."

He went a step toward the door, to show his client that the matter was really serious. But he turned back, and, addressing Madame Evangelista, he said—

"Do not suppose, madame, that I imagine you to be in collusion with my colleague in his ideas. I believe you to be an honest woman—a fine lady, who knows nothing of business."

"Thank you, my dear sir!" retorted Solonet.

"You know that there is no question of offense among lawyers," said Mathias. "But at least, madame, let me explain to you the upshot of this bargain. You are still young enough and handsome enough to marry again. Oh, dear me!" he went on, in reply to a gesture of the lady's, "who can answer for the future?"

"I never thought, monsieur," said she, "that after seven years of widowhood in the prime of life, and after refusing some splendid offers for my daughter's sake, I should, at nine-and-thirty, be thought capable of such madness. If we were not discussing business, I should regard such a speech as an impertinence."

"Would it not be a greater impertinence to assume that you could not remarry?"

"Can and will are very different words," said Solonet, with a gallant flourish.

"Well," said Mathias, "we need not talk about your marrying. You may—and we all hope you will—live for five-and-

forty years yet. Now, since you are to retain your life-interest in the income left by Monsieur Evangelista as long as you live, must your children dine with Duke Humphrey?"*

"What is the meaning of it all?" said the widow. "Who is Duke Humphrey, and what is life-interest?"

Solonet, a speaker of elegance and taste, began to laugh.

"I will translate," said the old man: "If your children wish to be prudent, they will think of the future. To think of the future means to save half one's income, supposing there are no more than two children, who must first have a good education, and then a handsome marriage-portion. Thus, your daughter and her husband will be reduced to living on twenty thousand francs a year when they have each been accustomed to spend fifty thousand while unmarried. And even that is nothing. My client will be expected to hand over to his children in due course eleven hundred thousand francs as their share of their mother's fortune, and he will never have received any of it if his wife should die and madame survive her—which is quite possible. In all conscience, is not this to throw himself into the Gironde, tied hand and foot? You wish to see Mademoiselle Natalie made happy? If she loves her husband—which no lawyer allows himself to doubt—she will share his troubles. Madame, I foresee enough to make her die of grief, for she will be miserably poor. Yes, madame, miserably poor; for it is poverty to those who require a hundred thousand francs a year to be reduced to twenty thousand. If love should lead Monsieur le Comte into extravagance, his wife would reduce him to beggary by claiming her share in the event of any disaster.

"I am arguing for your sake, for theirs, for that of their children—for all parties."

"The good man has certainly delivered a broadside," thought Solonet, with a glance at his client, as much as to say: "Come on!"

* To go hungry.

"There is a way of reconciling all these interests," replied Madame Evangelista calmly. "I may reserve only such a small allowance as may enable me to go into a convent, and you will become at once possessed of all my property. I will renounce the world if my death to it will secure my daughter's happiness."

"Madame," said the old man, "let us take time for mature consideration of the steps that may smooth away all difficulties."

"Bless me, my dear sir," cried Madame Evangelista, who foresaw that by delay she would be lost, "all has been considered. I did not know what marriage meant in France; I am a Spanish creole. I did not know that before I could see my daughter married I had to make sure how many days longer God would grant me to live, that my child would be wronged by my living, that I have no business to be alive or ever to have lived!

"When my husband married me I had nothing but my name and myself. My name was to him a treasure beside which his wealth paled. What fortune can compare with a great name? My fortune was my beauty, virtue, happy temper, birth, and breeding. Can money buy these gifts? If Natalie's father could hear this discussion, his magnanimous spirit would be grieved forever and his happiness would be marred in paradise. I spent millions of francs, foolishly I daresay, without his ever frowning even. Since his death I have been economical and thrifty by comparison with the life he liked me to lead. Let this end it! Monsieur de Manerville is so dejected that I——"

No words can represent the confusion and excitement produced by this exclamation "end it!" It is enough to say that these four well-bred persons all talked at once.

"In Spain you marry Spanish fashion, as you will; but in France you marry French fashion—rationally, and as you can," said Mathias.

"Ah, madame," Paul began, rousing himself from his stupor, "you are mistaken in my feelings——"

"This is not a question of feelings," said the old man, anxious to stop his client; "this is business affecting three generations. Was it we who made away with the missing millions—we, who merely ask to clear up the difficulties of which we are innocent?"

"Let us marry without further haggling," said the wily Maître Solonet.

"Haggling! Haggling! Do you call it haggling to defend the interests of the children and of their father and mother?" cried Mathias.

"Yes," Paul went on, addressing his mother-in-law, "I deplore the recklessness of my youth, which now hinders my closing this discussion with a word, as much as you deplore your ignorance of business matters and involuntary extravagance. God be my witness that at this moment I am not thinking of myself; a quiet life at Lanstrac has no terrors for me; but Mademoiselle Natalie would have to give up her tastes and habits. That would alter our whole existence."

"But where did Evangelista find his millions?" said the widow.

"Monsieur Evangelista was a man of business, he played the great game of commerce, he loaded ships and made considerable sums; we are a landed proprietor, our capital is sunk, and our income more or less fixed," the old lawyer replied.

"Still, there is a way out of the difficulty," said Solonet, speaking in a high-pitched key, and silencing the other three by attracting their attention and their eyes.

The young man was like a dexterous coachman who, holding the reins of a four-in-hand, amuses himself by lashing and, at the same time, holding in the team. He spurred their passions and soothed them by turns, making Paul foam in his harness, for to him life and happiness were in the balance;

and his client as well, for she did not see her way through the intricacies of the dispute.

"Madame Evangelista may, this very day, hand over the securities in the five per cents., and sell this house. Sold in lots, it will fetch three hundred thousand francs. Madame will pay you one hundred and fifty thousand francs. Thus, madame will pay down nine hundred and fifty thousand francs at once. Though this is not all she owes her daughter, can you find many fortunes to match it in France?"

"Well and good," said Mathias; "but what is madame to live on?"

At this question, which implied assent, Solonet said within himself—

"Oh, ho! old fox, so you are caught."

"Madame?" he said aloud. "Madame will keep the fifty thousand crowns left of the price of the house. That sum, added to the sale of her furniture, can be invested in an annuity, and will give her twenty thousand francs a year. Monsieur le Comte will arrange for her to live with him. Lanstrac is a large place. You have a good house in Paris," he went on, addressing Paul, "so madame your mother-in-law can live with you wherever you are. A widow who, having no house to keep up, has twenty thousand francs a year, is better off than madame was when she was mistress of all her fortune. Madame Evangelista has no one to care for but her daughter; Monsieur le Comte also stands alone; your heirs are in the distant future, there is no fear of conflicting interests.

"A son-in-law and a mother-in-law under such circumstances always join to form one household. Madame Evangelista will make up for the deficit of capital by paying a quota out of her annuity which will help toward the housekeeping. We know her to be too generous, too large-minded, to live as a charge on her children.

"Thus, you may live happy and united with a hundred thousand francs a year to spend—a sufficient income, surely,

Monsieur le Comte, to afford you, in any country, all the comforts of life and the indulgence of your fancies. And, believe me, young married people often feel the need of a third in the household. Now, I ask you, what third can be more suitable than an affectionate, good mother?"

Paul, as he listened to Solonet, thought he heard the voice of an angel. He looked at Mathias to see if he did not share his admiration for Solonet's fervid eloquence: for he did not know that, under the assumed enthusiasm of impassioned words, notaries, like attorneys, hide the cold and unremitting alertness of the diplomatist.

"A pretty paradise!" said the old man.

Bewildered by his client's delight, Mathias sat down on an ottoman, resting his head on one hand, lost in evidently grieved meditations. He knew too well the ponderous phrases in which men of business purposely shroud their tricks, and he was not the man to be duped by them. He stole a glance at his fellow-notary and at Madame Evangelista, who went on talking to Paul, and he tried to detect some indications of the plot of which the elaborate design was beginning to be perceptible.

"Monsieur," said Paul to Solonet, "I have to thank you for the care you have devoted to the conciliation of our interests. This arrangement solves all difficulties more happily than I had dared to hope—that is to say, if it suits you, madame," he added, turning to Madame Evangelista, "for I will have nothing to say to any plan that is not equally satisfactory to you."

"I?" said she. "Whatever will make my children happy will delight me. Do not consider me at all."

"But that must not be," said Paul eagerly. "If your comfort and dignity were not secured, Natalie and I would be more distressed about it than you yourself could be."

"Do not be uneasy on that score, Monsieur le Comte," said Solonet.

"Ah!" thought Maître Mathias, "they mean to make him kiss the rod before they scourge him."

"Be quite easy," Solonet went on; "there is such a spirit of speculation in Bordeaux just now that investments for annuities are to be made on very advantageous terms. After handing over to you the fifty thousand crowns due to you on the sale of the house and furniture, I believe I may guarantee to madame a residue of two hundred thousand francs. This I undertake to invest in an annuity on a first mortgage on an estate worth a million, and to get ten per cent., twenty-five thousand francs a year. Thus we should unite two very nearly equal fortunes. Mademoiselle Natalie will bring forty thousand francs a year in five per cents. and a hundred and fifty thousand francs in money, which will yield seven thousand francs a year: total, forty-seven as against your forty-six thousand."

"That is quite plain," said Paul.

As he ended his speech, Solonet had cast a side-long glance at his client, not unseen by Mathias, and which was as much as to say:

"Bring up your reserves."

"Why!" cried Madame Evangelista in a tone of joy that seemed quite genuine, "I can give Natalie my diamonds; they must be worth at least a hundred thousand francs."

"We can have them valued," said Solonet, "and this entirely alters the case. Nothing, then, can hinder Monsieur le Comte from giving a discharge in full for the sums due to Mademoiselle Natalie as her share of her father's fortune, or the betrothed couple from taking the guardian's accounts as passed, at the reading of the contract. If madame, with truly Spanish magnificence, despoils herself to fulfill her obligations within a hundred thousand francs of the sum-total, it is but fair to release her."

"Nothing could be fairer," said Paul. "I am only over-powered by so much generosity."

"Is not my daughter my second self?" said Madame Evangelista.

Maitre Mathias detected an expression of joy on Madame Evangelista's face when she saw the difficulties so nearly set aside; and this, and the sudden recollection of the diamonds, brought out like fresh troops, confirmed all his suspicions.

"The scene was planned between them," thought he, "as gamblers pack the cards when some pigeon is to be rooked. So the poor boy I have known from his cradle is to be plucked alive by a mother-in-law, done brown by love, and ruined by his wife? After taking such care of his fine estate, am I to see it gobbled up in a single evening? Three and a half millions mortgaged, in fact, to guarantee eleven hundred thousand francs of her portion, which these two women will make him throw away."

As he thus discerned in Madame Evangelista's soul a scheme which was not dishonest or criminal—which was not thieving, or cheating, or swindling—which was not based on any evil or blamable feeling, but yet contained the germ of every crime, Maitre Mathias was neither shocked nor generously indignant. He was not a misanthrope; he was an old lawyer, inured by his business to the keen self-interest of men of the world, to their ingenious treachery, more deadly than a bold highway murder committed by some poor devil who is guillotined with due solemnity. In the higher ranks these passages of arms, these diplomatic discussions, are like the little dark corners into which every kind of filth is shot.

Maitre Mathias, very sorry for his client, cast a long look into the future, and saw no hope of good.

"Well, we must take the field with the same weapons," said he to himself, "and beat them on their own ground."

At this juncture Paul, Solonet, and Madame Evangelista, dismayed by the old man's silence, were feeling the necessity of this stern censor's approbation to sanction these arrangements, and all three looked at him.

“Well, my dear sir, and what do you think of this?” asked Paul.

“This is what I think,” replied the uncompromising and conscientious old man, “you are not rich enough to commit such princely follies. The estate of Lanstrac, valued at three per cent., is worth one million of francs, including the furniture; the farms of le Grassol and le Guadet, with the vineyards of Bellerose, are worth another million; your two residences and furniture a third million. To meet these three millions, yielding an income of forty-seven thousand two hundred francs, Mademoiselle Natalie shows eight hundred thousand francs in the Funds, and let us say one hundred thousand francs’ worth of diamonds—at a hypothetical valuation! Also, one hundred and fifty thousand francs in cash—one million and fifty thousand francs in all. Then, in the face of these facts, my friend here triumphantly asserts that we are uniting equal fortunes! He requires us to stand indebted in a hundred thousand francs to our children, since we are to give the lady a discharge in full, by taking the guardian’s accounts as passed, for a sum of eleven hundred and fifty-six thousand francs, while receiving only one million and fifty thousand!

“You can listen to this nonsense with a lover’s rapture; and do you suppose that old Mathias, who is not in love, will forget his arithmetic and fail to appreciate the difference between landed estate of enormous value as capital, and of increasing value, and the income derivable from money in securities which are liable to fluctuations in value and diminution of interest? I am old enough to have seen land improve and funds fall. You called me in, Monsieur le Comte, to stipulate for your interests; allow me to protect them or dismiss me.”

“If monsieur looks for a fortune of which the capital is a match for his own,” said Solonet, “we have nothing like three millions and a half; that is self-evident. If you can

show these overpowering millions, we have but our one poor little million to offer—a mere trifle! three times as much as the dower of an archduchess of Austria. Bonaparte received two hundred and fifty thousand francs when he married Marie Louise.”

“Marie Louise ruined Napoleon,” said Maître Mathias in a growl.

Natalie’s mother understood the bearing of this speech.

“If my sacrifices are in vain,” she exclaimed, “I decline to carry such a discussion any further; I trust to the count’s discretion, and renounce the honor of his proposals for my daughter.”

After the manœuvres planned by the young notary this battle of conflicting interests had reached the point where the victory ought to have rested with Madame Evangelista. The mother-in-law had opened her heart, abandoned her possessions, and was almost released. The intending husband was bound to accept the conditions laid down beforehand by the collusion of Maître Solonet and his client, or sin against every law of generosity, and be false to his love.

Like the hand of a clock moved by the works, Paul came duly to the point.

“What, madame,” cried he, “you could undo in one moment——”

“Why, monsieur, to whom do I owe my duty? To my daughter. When she is one-and-twenty she will pass my accounts and release me. She will have a million francs, and can, if she pleases, choose among the sons of the peers of France. Is she not the daughter of a Casa-Real?”

“Madame is quite justified. Why should she be worse off to-day than she will be fourteen months hence? Do not rob her of the benefits of her position,” said Solonet.

“Mathias,” said Paul, with deep grief, “there are two ways of being ruined—and at this moment you have undone me!”

He went toward the old lawyer, no doubt intending to order that the contract should be at once drawn up. Mathias forefended this disaster by a glance which seemed to say, "Wait!" He saw tears in Paul's eyes—tears of shame at the tenor of this debate, and at the peremptory tone in which Madame Evangelista had thrown him over—and he checked them by a start, the start of Archimedes, successful in his search, crying EUREKA!

The words "Peer of France" had flashed light on his mind like a torch in a cavern.

At this instant Natalie reappeared, as lovely as the dawn, and said with an innocent air:

"Am I in the way?"

"Strangely in the way, my child!" replied her mother, with cruel bitterness.

"Come, dear Natalie," said Paul, taking her hand and leading her to a chair by the fire, "everything is settled!" for he could not endure to think that his hopes were overthrown.

And Mathias eagerly put in:

"Yes, everything can yet be settled."

Like a general who in one move baffles the tactics of the enemy, the old lawyer had had a vision of the Genius that watches over notaries, unfolding before him in legal script a conception that might save the future prospects of Paul and of his children. Maître Solonet knew of no other issue from these irreconcilable difficulties than the determination to which the young count had been led by love, and by this storm of contending feelings and interests; so he was excessively surprised by his senior's remark.

Curious to know what remedy Maître Mathias had to suggest for a state of things which must have seemed to him past all hope, he asked him:

"What have you to propose?"

"Natalie, my dear child, leave us," said Madame Evangelista.

"Mademoiselle is not *de trop*," replied Maître Mathias, with a smile. "I speak as much for her as for Monsieur le Comte."

There was a solemn silence, each one in great excitement awaiting the old man's speech with the utmost curiosity.

"In our day," Mathias went on after a pause, "the notary's profession has changed in many ways. In our day political revolutions affect the future prospects of families, and this used not to be the case. Formerly life ran in fixed grooves, ranks were clearly defined——"

"We are not here to listen to a lecture on political economy, but to arrange a marriage-contract," said Solonet, with a flip-pant impatience, and interrupting the old man.

"I beg you to allow me to speak in my turn," said Mathias.

Solonet took his seat on the ottoman, saying to Madame Evangelista in an undertone—

"Now you will learn what we lawyers mean by rigmarole."

"Notaries are consequently obliged to watch the course of politics, since they now are intimately concerned with private affairs. To give you an instance: Formerly noble families had inalienable fortunes, but the Revolution overthrew them; the present system tends to reconstructing such fortunes," said the old man, indulging somewhat in the twaddle of the *tabellionaris boa constrictor*. "Now, Monsieur le Comte, in virtue of his name, his talents, and his wealth, is evidently destined to sit some day in the lower Chamber; destiny may perhaps lead him to the upper and hereditary Chamber; and, as we know, he has every qualification that may justify our prognostics. Are you not of my opinion, madame?" said he to the widow.

"You have anticipated my dearest hope," said she,

"Manerville must be a peer of France, or I shall die of grief."

"All that may tend to that end——?" said Maître Mathias, appealing to the mother-in-law with a look of frank good-humor.

"Answers to my dearest wish," she put in.

"Well, then," said Mathias, "is not this marriage a fitting opportunity for creating an entail? Such a foundation will most certainly be an argument in the eyes of the present government for the nomination of my client when a batch of peers is created. Monsieur le Comte will, of course, dedicate to this purpose the estate of Lanstrac, worth about a million. I do not ask that mademoiselle should contribute an equal sum; that would not be fair; but we may take eight hundred thousand francs of her money for the purpose. I know of two estates for sale at this moment, bordering on the lands of Lanstrac, in which those eight hundred thousand francs, to be sunk in real estate, may be invested at four and a half per cent. The Paris house ought also to be included in the entail. The surplus of the two fortunes, wisely managed, will amply suffice to provide for the younger children. If the contracting parties can agree as to these details, Monsieur de Manerville may then pass your guardian's accounts and be chargeable for the balance. I will consent."

"*Questa coda non è di questo gatto!*" (this tail does not fit that cat) exclaimed Madame Evangelista, looking at her sponsor, Solonet, and pointing to Maître Mathias.

"There is something behind all this," said Solonet in an undertone.

"And what is all this muddle for?" Paul asked of Mathias, going with him into the adjoining room.

"To save you from ruin," said the old notary in a whisper. "You are quite bent on marrying a girl—and her mother—who have made away with two millions of francs in seven years; you are accepting a debt of more than a hundred thou-

sand francs to your children, to whom you will some day have to hand over eleven hundred and fifty-six thousand francs on their mother's behalf, when you are receiving hardly a million. You run the risk of seeing your whole fortune melt away in five years, leaving you as bare as St. John the Baptist, while you will remain the debtor in enormous sums to your wife and her representatives. If you choose to embark in that boat, go on, Monsieur le Comte ; but at least allow your old friend to save the house of Manerville."

"But how will this save it?" asked Paul.

"Listen, Monsieur le Comte ; you are very much in love?"

"Yes," replied Paul.

"A man in love is about as secret as a cannon-shot ; I will tell you nothing ! If you were to repeat things, your marriage might come to nothing, so I place your love under the protection of my silence. You trust to my fidelity?"

"What a question !"

"Well, then, let me tell you that Madame Evangelista, her notary, and her daughter were playing a trick on us all through, and are more than clever. By heaven, what sharp practice !"

"Natalie?" cried Paul.

"Well, I will not swear to that," said the old man. "You want her—take her ! But I wish this marriage might fall through without the smallest blame to you !"

"Why?"

"That girl would beggar Peru. Beside, she rides like a circus-rider ; she is what you may call emancipated. Women of that sort make bad wives."

Paul pressed his old friend's hand and replied with a little fatuous smile.

"Don't be alarmed. And for the moment, what must I do?"

"Stand firm to these conditions ; they will consent, for the bargain does not damage their interests. And beside, all

Madame Evangelista wants is to get her daughter married ; I have seen her hand ; do not trust her."

Paul returned to the drawing-room, where he found the widow talking in low tones to Solonet, just as he had been talking to Mathias. Natalie, left out of this mysterious conference, was playing with a screen. Somewhat out of countenance, she was wondering : " What absurdity keeps me from all knowledge of my own concerns ? "

The younger lawyer was taking in the general outlines and remote effects of a stipulation based on the personal pride of the parties concerned, into which his client had blindly rushed. But though Mathias was now nothing else but a notary, Solonet was still to some degree a man, and carried some juvenile conceit into his dealings. It often happens that personal vanity makes a young lawyer forgetful of his client's interests. Under these circumstances, Maître Solonet, who would not allow the widow to think that Nestor was beating Achilles, was advising her to conclude the matter at once on these lines. Little did he care for the ultimate fulfillment of the contract ; to him victory meant the release of Madame Evangelista with an assured income, and the marriage of Natalie.

" All Bordeaux will know that you have settled about eleven hundred thousand francs on your daughter, and that you still have twenty-five thousand francs a year," said Solonet in the lady's ear. " I had not hoped for such a brilliant result."

" But," said she, " explain to me why the creation of an entail should so immediately have stilled the storm."

" Distrust of you and your daughter. An entailed estate is inalienable : neither husband nor wife can touch it."

" That is a positive insult."

" Oh, no. We call that foresight. The good man caught you in a snare. If you refuse the entail, he will say : ' Then you want to squander my client's fortune ; ' whereas, if he creates an entail, it is out of all risk, just as if the couple were married under the provisions of the trust."

Solonet silenced his own scruples by reflecting—

“These stipulations will only take effect in the remote future, and by that time Madame Evangelista will be dead and buried.”

She, for her part, was satisfied with Solonet’s explanation; she had entire confidence in him. She was perfectly ignorant of the law; she saw her daughter married, and that was all she asked for the nonce; she was delighted at their success. And so, as Mathias suspected, neither Solonet nor Madame Evangelista as yet understood the full extent of his plan, which had incontrovertible reasons to support it.

“Well, then, Monsieur Mathias,” said the widow, “everything is satisfactory.”

“Madame, if you and Monsieur le Comte agree to these conditions, you should exchange pledges. It is fully understood by you both, is it not,” he went on, “that the marriage takes place only on condition of the creation of an entail, including the estate of Lanstrac and the house in the Rue de la Pépinière, both belonging to the intending husband; *item*: eight hundred thousand francs deducted in money from the portion of the intending wife to be invested in land? Forgive me, madame, for repeating this; a solemn and positive pledge is necessary in such a case. The formation of an entail requires many formalities—it must be registered in Chancery and receive the royal signature; and we ought to proceed at once to the purchase of the lands, so as to include them in the schedule of property which the royal patent renders inalienable. In many families a document would be required; but, as between you, verbal consent will no doubt be sufficient. Do you both consent?”

“Yes,” said Madame Evangelista.

“Yes,” said Paul.

“And how about me?” asked Natalie, laughing.

“You, mademoiselle, are a minor,” replied Solonet, “and that need not distress you!”

It was then agreed that Maître Mathias should draw up the contract, and Maître Solonet audit the guardian's accounts, and that all the papers should be signed, in agreement with the law, a day or two before the wedding.

After a few civilities the lawyers rose.

"It is raining, Mathias; shall I take you home? I have my cab here," said Solonet.

"My carriage is at your service," said Paul, preparing to accompany the good man.

"I will not rob you of a minute," said the old man; "I will accept my friend's offer."

"Well," said Achilles to Nestor, as the carriage rolled on its way, "you have been truly patriarchal. Those young people would, no doubt, have ruined themselves."

"I was uneasy about the future," said Mathias, not betraying the real motive of his proposal.

At this moment the two lawyers were like two actors who shake hands behind the scenes after playing on the stage a scene of hatred and provocation.

"But is it not my business," said Solonet, who was thinking of technicalities, "to purchase the lands of which you speak? Is it not our money that is to be invested?"

"How can you include Mademoiselle Evangelista's land in an entail created by the Comte de Manerville?" asked Mathias.

"That difficulty can be settled in Chancery," said Solonet.

"But I am the seller's notary as well as the buyer's," replied Mathias. "Beside, Monsieur de Manerville can purchase in his own name. When it comes to paying, we can state the use of the wife's portion."

"You have an answer for everything, my worthy senior," said Solonet, laughing. "You have been grand this evening, and you have beaten us."

"Well, for an old fellow unprepared for your batteries loaded with grape-shot, it was not so bad, eh?"

"Ah, ha!" laughed Solonet.

The odious contest in which the happiness of a family had been so narrowly risked was to them no more than a matter of legal polemics. "We have not gone through forty years of chicanery for nothing," said Mathias. "Solonet," he added, "I am a good-natured fellow; you may be present at the sale and purchase of the lands to be added to the estate."

"Thank you, my good friend! You will find me at your service in case of need."

While the two notaries were thus peaceably going on their way, with no emotion beyond a little dryness of the throat, Paul and Madame Evangelista were suffering from the nervous trepidation, the fluttering about the heart, the spasm of brain and spine, to which persons of strong passions are prone after a scene when their interests or their feelings have been severely attacked. In Madame Evangelista these mutterings of the dispersing storm were aggravated by a terrible thought, a lurid gleam that needed explanation.

"Has not Maître Mathias overthrown my six months' labors?" she wondered. "Has he not destroyed my influence over Paul by filling him with base suspicions during their conference in the inner room?"

She stood in front of the fireplace, her elbow resting on the corner of the mantelpiece, lost in thought.

When the outer gate closed behind the notary's carriage, she turned to her son-in-law, eager to settle her doubts.

"This has been the most terrible day of my life," cried Paul, really glad to see the end of all these difficulties. "I know no tougher customer than old Mathias. God grant his wishes and make me peer of France! Dear Natalie, I desire it more for your sake than for my own. You are my sole ambition. I live in and for you."

On hearing these words spoken from the heart, and especially as she looked into Paul's clear eyes, whose look was as

free from any concealment as his open brow, Madame Evangelista's joy was complete. She blamed herself for the somewhat sharp terms in which she had tried to spur her son-in-law, and in the triumph of success determined to make all smooth for the future. Her face was calm again, and her eyes expressed the sweet friendliness that made her so attractive as she replied—

"I may truly say the same. And perhaps, my dear boy, my Spanish temper carried me further than my heart intended. Be always what you are—as good as gold! And owe me no grudge for a few ill-considered words. Give me your hand, let——"

Paul was overwhelmed; he blamed himself in a thousand things, and embraced Madame Evangelista.

"Dear Paul," said she with emotion, "why could not those two scribes arrange matters without us, since it has all come right in the end?"

"But then," said Paul, "I should not have known how noble and generous you could be."

"Well said, Paul!" cried Natalie, taking his hand.

"We have several little matters to settle yet, my dear boy," said Madame Evangelista. "My daughter and I are superior to the follies of which some people think so much. For instance, Natalie will need no diamonds—I give her mine."

"Oh! my dear mother, do you suppose I should accept them?" cried Natalie.

"Yes, my child, they are a condition of the contract."

"I will not have them! I will never marry!" said Natalie vehemently. "Keep what my father gave you with so much pleasure. How can Monsieur Paul demand——?"

"Be silent, dear child," said her mother, her eyes filling with tears; "my ignorance of business requires far more than that."

"What?"

"I must sell this house to pay you what I owe you."

"What can you owe to me," said the girl—"to me, who owe my life to you? Can I ever repay you? On the contrary, if my marriage is to cost you the smallest sacrifice, I will never marry!"

"You are but a child!"

"My dear Natalie," said Paul, "you must understand that it is neither I, nor you, nor your mother who insists on these sacrifices, but the children——"

"But if I do not marry," she interrupted.

"Then you do not love me?" said Paul.

"Come, silly child," said her mother; "do you suppose that a marriage-contract is a house of cards to be blown down at your pleasure? Poor ignorant darling, you do not know what trouble we have been at to create an entailed estate for your eldest son. Do not throw us back into the troubles from which we have escaped."

"But why ruin my mother?" said Natalie to Paul.

"Why are you so rich?" he said, with a smile.

"Do not discuss the matter too far, my children; you are not married yet," said Madame Evangelista. "Paul," she went on, "Natalie needs no wedding-gifts, no jewels, no trousseau; she has everything in profusion. Save the money you would have spent in presents to secure to yourselves some permanent home luxuries. There is nothing to my mind so foolishly vulgar as the expenditure of a hundred thousand francs in a *corbeille*,* of which nothing is left at last but an old white satin-covered trunk. Five thousand francs a year, on the other hand, as pin-money, save a young wife many small cares, and are hers for life. And indeed you will want the money of the *corbeille* to refurnish your house in Paris this winter. We will come back to Lanstrac in the spring; Solonet will have settled all our affairs in the course of the winter."

*The bridegroom's presents of lace, jewels, and apparel constitute the *corbeille* or "basket."

"Then all is well," said Paul, at the height of happiness.

"And I shall see Paris!" cried Natalie, in a tone that might indeed have alarmed a de Marsay.

"If that is quite settled, I will write to de Marsay to secure a box for the winter season at the Italian opera."

"You are most nice! I dared not ask it of you," said Natalie. "Marriage is a delightful institution if it gives husbands the power of guessing their wives' wishes."

"That is precisely what it is," said Paul. "But it is midnight—I must go."

"Why so early this evening?" said Madame Evangelista, who was lavish of the attentions to which men are so keenly alive.

Though the whole business had been conducted on terms of the most refined politeness, the effect of this clashing of interests had sown a germ of distrust and hostility between the lady and her son-in-law, ready to develop at the first spark of anger, or under the heat of a too strong display of feeling.

In most families the question of settlements and allowances under the marriage-contract is prone to give rise to these primitive conflicts, stirred up by wounded pride or injured feelings, by some reluctance to make any sacrifice, or the desire to minimize it. When a difficulty arises, must there not be a conqueror and a conquered? The parents of the plighted couple try to bring the affair to a happy issue; in their eyes it is a purely commercial transaction, allowing all the tricks, the profits, and the deceptions of trade. As a rule, the husband only is initiated into the secret of the transaction, and the young wife remains, as did Natalie, ignorant of the stipulations which make her rich or poor.

Paul, as he went home, reflected that, thanks to his lawyer's ingenuity, his fortune was almost certainly secured against ruin. If Madame Evangelista lived with her daughter, the household would have more than a hundred thousand francs

a year for ordinary expenses. Thus his hopes of a happy life would be realized.

"My mother-in-law seems to me a very good sort of woman," he reflected, still under the influence of the wheedling ways by which Madame Evangelista had succeeded in dissipating the clouds raised by the discussion. "Mathias is mistaken. These lawyers are strange beings; they poison everything. The mischief was made by that contentious little Solonet, who wanted to be clever."

While Paul, as he went to bed, was recapitulating the advantages he had won in the course of the evening, Madame Evangelista was no less confident of having gained the victory.

"Well, darling mother, are you satisfied?" said Natalie, following her mother into her bedroom.

"Yes, my love, everything has succeeded as I wished, and I feel a weight taken off my shoulders, which crushed me this morning. Paul is really an excellent fellow. Dear boy! Yes, we can certainly give him a delightful life. You will make him happy, and I will take care of his political prospects. The Spanish ambassador is an old friend of mine. I will renew my acquaintance with him and with several other persons. We shall soon be in the heart of politics, and all will be well with us. The pleasure for you, dear children; for me the later and more serious occupations of life—the game of ambition.

"Do not be alarmed at my selling this house; do you suppose we should ever return to Bordeaux? To Lanstrac—yes. But we shall spend every winter in Paris, where our true interests now lie. Well, Natalie, was what I asked you so difficult to do?"

"My dear mother, I was ashamed at moments."

"Solonet advises me to buy an annuity with the price of the house," said Madame Evangelista, "but I must make some other arrangement. I will not deprive you of one sou of my capital."

"You were all very angry, I saw," said Natalie. "How was the storm appeased?"

"By the offer of my diamonds," replied her mother. "Solonet was in the right. How cleverly he managed the business! But fetch my jewel-box, Natalie. I never seriously inquired what those diamonds were worth. When I said a hundred thousand francs, it was absurd. Did not Madame de Gyas declare that the necklace and earrings your father gave me on the day of our wedding were alone worth as much? My poor husband was so lavish! And then the family diamond given by Philip II. to the Duke of Alva, and left to me by my aunt—the Discreto—was, I believe, valued then at four thousand quadruples."

Natalie brought out and laid on her mother's dressing-table pearl necklaces, sets of jewels, gold bracelets, gems of every kind, piling them up with the inexpressible satisfaction that rejoices the heart of some women at the sight of these valuables, with which, according to the Talmud, the fallen angels tempted the daughters of men, bringing up from the bowels of the earth these blossoms of celestial fires.

"Certainly," said Madame Evangelista, "although I know nothing of precious stones but how to accept them and wear them, it seems to me that these must be worth a great deal of money. And then, if we all live together, I can sell my plate, which is worth thirty thousand francs at the mere value of the silver. I remember when we brought it from Lima that was the valuation at the Custom House here. Solonet is right. I will send for Élie Magus. The Jew will tell me the value of these stones. I may perhaps escape sinking the rest of my capital in an annuity."

"What a beautiful string of pearls?" said Natalie, admiringly.

"I hope he will give you that if he loves you. Indeed, he ought to have all the stones reset and make them a present to you. The diamonds are yours by settlement. Well, good-

night, my darling. After such a fatiguing day, we both need sleep."

The woman of fashion, the creole, the fine lady, incapable of understanding the conditions of a contract that was not yet drawn up, fell asleep in full content at seeing her daughter the wife of a man she could so easily manage, who would leave them to be on equal terms the mistresses of his house, and whose fortune, combined with their own, would allow of their living in the way to which they were accustomed. Even after paying up her daughter, for whose whole fortune she was to receive a discharge, Madame Evangelista would still have enough to live upon.

"How absurd I was to be so worried!" said she to herself. "I wish the marriage was over and done with."

So Madame Evangelista, Paul, Natalie, and the two lawyers were all delighted with the results of this first meeting. The *Te Deum* was sung in both camps—a perilous state of things! The moment must come when the vanquished would no longer be deluded. To Madame Evangelista her son-in-law was conquered.

Next morning Élie Magus came to the widow's house, supposing, from the rumors current as to Mademoiselle Natalie's approaching marriage to Count Paul, that they wanted to purchase diamonds. What, then, was his surprise on learning that he was wanted to make a more or less official valuation of the mother-in-law's jewels. The Jewish instinct, added to a few insidious questions, led him to conclude that the value was to be included in the property under the marriage-contract.

As the stones were not for sale, he priced them as a merchant selling to a private purchaser. Experts alone know Indian diamonds from those of Brazil. The stones from Golconda and Vizapur are distinguishable by a whiteness and clear brilliancy which the others have not, their hue being

yellow, and this depreciates their selling value. Madame Evangelista's necklace and earrings, being entirely composed of Asiatic stones, were valued by Élie Magus at two hundred and fifty thousand francs. As to the Discreto, it was, he said, one of the finest diamonds extant in private hands, and was worth a hundred thousand francs.

On hearing these figures, which showed her how liberal her husband had been, Madame Evangelista asked whether she could have that sum at once."

"If you wish to sell them, madame," said the Jew, "I can only give you seventy thousand francs for the single stone, and a hundred and sixty thousand for the necklace and earrings."

"And why such a reduction?" asked Madame Evangelista in surprise.

"Madame," said he, "the finer the jewels, the longer we have to keep them. The opportunities for sale are rare in proportion to the greater value of the diamonds. As the dealer cannot afford to lose the interest on his money, the recoupment for that interest, added to the risks of rise and fall in the market, accounts for the difference between the selling and purchasing value. For twenty years you have been losing the interest of three hundred thousand francs. If you have worn your diamonds ten times a year, it has cost you a thousand crowns each time. How many handsome dresses you might have had for a thousand crowns! Persons who keep their diamonds are fools; however, happily for us, ladies do not understand these calculations."

"I am much obliged to you for having explained them to me; I will profit by the lesson."

"Then you want to sell?" cried the Jew eagerly.

"What are the rest worth?" said Madame Evangelista.

The Jew examined the gold of the settings, held the pearls to the light, turned over the rubies, the tiaras, brooches, bracelets, clasps, and chains, and mumbled out—

"There are several Portuguese diamonds brought from Brazil. I cannot give more than a hundred thousand francs for the lot. But sold to a customer," he added, "they would fetch more than fifty thousand crowns."

"We will keep them," said the lady.

"You are wrong," replied Élie Magus. "With the income of the sum now sunk in them, in five years you could buy others just as fine, and still have the capital."

This rather singular interview was soon known, and confirmed the rumors to which the discussion of the contract had given rise. In a provincial town everything is known. The servants of the house, having heard loud voices, supposed the dispute to have been warmer than it was; their gossip with other people's servants spread far and wide, and from the lower depths came up to the masters. The attention of the upper and citizen circles was concentrated on the marriage of two persons of equal wealth. Everybody, great and small, talked the matter over, and within a week the strangest reports were afloat in Bordeaux. Madame Evangelista was selling her house, so she must be ruined. She had offered her diamonds to Élie Magus. Nothing was yet final between her and the Comte de Manerville. Would the marriage ever come off? Some said Yes; others said No. The two lawyers, on being questioned, denied these calumnies, and said that the difficulties were purely technical, arising from the formalities of creating an entail.

But when public opinion has rushed down an incline, it is very difficult to get it up again. Though Paul went every day to Madame Evangelista's, and in spite of the assertions of the two notaries, the insinuated slander held its own. Several young ladies, and their mothers or their aunts, aggrieved by a match of which they or their families had dreamed for themselves, could no more forgive Madame Evangelista for her good-luck than an author forgives his friend for a success. Some were only too glad to be avenged for the twenty years

of luxury and splendor by which the Spaniards had crushed their vanities. A bigwig at the prefecture declared that the two notaries and the two parties concerned could say no more, nor behave otherwise, if the rupture were complete. The time it took to settle the entail confirmed the suspicions of the citizens of Bordeaux.

"They will sit by the chimney-corner all the winter; then, in the spring, they will go to some watering-place; and in the course of the year we shall hear that the match is broken off."

"You will see," said one set, "in order to save the credit of both parties, the obstacles will not have arisen on either side; there will be some demur in Chancery, some hitch discovered by the lawyers to hinder the entail."

"Madame Evangelista," said the others, "has been living at a rate that would have exhausted the mines of Valenciana. Then, when pay-day came round there was nothing to be found."

What a capital opportunity for calculating the handsome widow's expenditure, so as to prove her ruin to a demonstration! Rumor ran so high that bets were laid for and against the marriage. And, in accordance with the accepted rules of society, this tittle-tattle remained unknown to the interested parties. No one was sufficiently inimical to Paul or Madame Evangelista to attack them on the subject.

Paul had some business at Lanstrac and took advantage of it to make up a shooting-party, inviting some of the young men of the town as a sort of farewell to his bachelor life. This shooting-party was regarded by society as a flagrant confirmation of its suspicions.

At this juncture Madame de Gyas, who had a daughter to marry, thought it well to sound her way, and to rejoice sadly over the checkmate offered to Madame Evangelista. Natalie and her mother were not a little astonished to see the marquise's badly assumed distress, and asked her if anything had annoyed her.

"Why," said she, "can you be ignorant of the reports current in Bordeaux? Though I feel sure that they are false, I have come to ascertain the truth and put a stop to them, at any rate in my own circle of friends. To be the dupe or the accomplice of such a misapprehension is to be in a false position, in which no true friend can endure to remain."

"But what in the world is happening?" asked the mother and daughter.

Madame de Gyas then had the pleasure of repeating everybody's comments, not sparing her intimate friends a single dagger-thrust. Natalie and her mother looked at each other and laughed; but they quite understood the purpose and motives of their friend's revelation. The Spanish lady revenged herself much as Célimène did on Arsinoé.

"My dear—you who know what provincial life is—you must know of what a mother is capable when she has a daughter on her hands who does not marry, for lack of a fortune and a lover, of beauty and talent—for lack of everything sometimes! She would rob a diligence, she would commit murder, waylay a man at a street corner, and give herself away a hundred times, if she were worth giving. There are plenty such in Bordeaux, who are ready, no doubt, to attribute to us their thoughts and actions. Naturalists have described the manners and customs of many fierce animals, but they have overlooked the mother and daughter in quest of a husband. They are hyænas who, as the Psalmist has it, seek whom they may devour, and who add to the nature of the wild beast the intelligence of man and the genius of woman.

"That such little Bordeaux spiders as Mademoiselle de Belor, Mademoiselle de Trans, and their like, who have spread their nets for so long without seeing a fly, or hearing the least hum of wings near them—that they should be furious I understand, and I forgive them their venomous tattle. But that you, who have a title and money, who are not in the least provincial, who have a clever and accomplished daughter,

pretty and free to pick and choose—that you, so far above everybody here by your Parisian elegance, should have taken such a tone, is really a matter of astonishment. Am I expected to account to the public for the matrimonial stipulations which our men of business have considered necessary under the political conditions which will govern my son-in-law's existence? Is the mania for public discussion to invade the privacy of family life? Ought I to have invited the fathers and mothers of your province, under sealed covers, to come and vote on the articles of our marriage-contract?"

A torrent of epigrams was poured out on Bordeaux.

Madame Evangelista was about to leave the town; she could afford to criticise her friends and enemies, to caricature them, and lash them at will, having nothing to fear from them. So she gave vent to all the remarks she had stored up, the revenges she had postponed, and her surprise that any one should deny the existence of the sun at noonday.

"Really, my dear," said the Marquise de Gyas, "Monsieur de Manerville's visit to Lanstrac, these parties to young men—under such circumstances——"

"Really, my dear," retorted the fine lady, interrupting her, "can you suppose that we care for the trumpery proprieties of a middle-class marriage? Am I to keep Count Paul in leading-strings, as if he would run away? Do you think he needs watching by the police? Need we fear his being spirited away by some Bordeaux conspiracy?"

"Believe me, my dear friend, you give me infinite pleasure——"

The marquise was cut short in her speech by the manservant announcing Paul. Like all lovers, Paul had thought it delightful to ride eight leagues in order to spend an hour with Natalie. He had left his friends to their sport, and came in, booted and spurred, his whip in his hand.

"Dear Paul," said Natalie, "you have no idea how effectually you are answering madame at this moment."

When Paul heard the calumnies that were rife in Bordeaux, he laughed instead of being angry.

"The good people have heard, no doubt, that there will be none of the gay and uproarious doings usual in the country, no midday ceremony in church, and they are furious. Well, dear mother," said he, kissing Madame Evangelista's hand, "we will fling a ball at their heads on the day when the contract is signed, as a fête is thrown to the mob in the square of the Champs Élysées, and give our good friends the painful pleasure of such a signing as is rarely seen in a provincial city!"

This incident was of great importance. Madame Evangelista invited all Bordeaux on the occasion, and expressed her intention of displaying in this final entertainment a magnificence that should give the lie unmistakably to silly and false reports. She was thus solemnly pledged to the world to carry through this marriage.

The preparations for this ball went on for forty days, and it was known as the "evening of the camellias," there were such immense numbers of these flowers on the stairs, in the ante-room, and in the great supper-room. The time agreed with the necessary delay for the preliminary formalities of the marriage, and the steps taken in Paris for the settlement of the entail. The lands adjoining Lanstrac were purchased, the banns were published, and doubts were dispelled. Friends and foes had nothing left to think about but the preparation of their dresses for the great occasion.

The time taken up by these details overlaid the difficulties raised at the first meeting, and carried away into oblivion the words and retorts of the stormy altercation that had arisen over the question of the settlements. Neither Paul nor his mother-in-law thought any more of the matter. Was it not, as Madame Evangelista had said, the lawyers' business? But who is there that has not known, in the rush of a busy phase

of life, what it is to be suddenly startled by the voice of memory, speaking too late, and recalling some important fact, some imminent danger?

On the morning of the day when the contract was to be signed, one of these will-o'-the-wisps of the brain flashed upon Madame Evangelista between sleeping and waking. The phrase spoken by herself at the moment when Mathias agreed to Solonet's proposal was, as it were, shouted in her ear: *Questa coda non è di questo gatto*. In spite of her ignorance of business, Madame Evangelista said to herself: "If that sharp old lawyer is satisfied, it is at the expense of one or other of the parties." And the damaged interest was certainly not on Paul's side, as she had hoped. Was it her daughter's fortune, then, that was to pay the costs of the war? She resolved to make full inquiries as to the tenor of the bargain, though she did not consider what she could do in the event of finding her own interests too seriously compromised.

The events of this day had so serious an influence on Paul's married life that it is necessary to give some account of the external details which have their effect on every mind.

As the house was forthwith to be sold, the Comte de Manerville's mother-in-law had hesitated at no expense. The forecourt was graveled, covered in with a tent, and filled with shrubs, though it was winter. The camellias, which were talked of from Dax to Angoulême, decked the stairs and vestibules. A wall had been removed to enlarge the supper-room and ballroom. Bordeaux, splendid with the luxury of many a colonial fortune, eagerly anticipated a fairy scene. By eight o'clock, when the business was drawing to a close, the populace, curious to see the ladies' dresses, formed a hedge on each side of the gateway. Thus the heady atmosphere of a great festivity excited all concerned at the moment of signing the contract. At the very crisis the little lamps fixed on yew-trees were already lighted, and the rumbling of the first carriages came up from the forecourt.

The two lawyers had dined with the bride and bridegroom and the mother-in-law. Mathias' head-clerk, who was to see the contract signed by certain of the guests in the course of the evening, and to take care that it was not read, was also one of the party.

The reader will rack his memory in vain—no dress, no woman was ever to compare with Natalie's beauty in her satin and lace, her hair beautifully dressed in a mass of curls falling about her neck ; she was like a flower in its natural setting of foliage.

Madame Evangelista, in a cherry-colored velvet, cleverly designed to set off the brilliancy of her eyes, her complexion, and her hair, with all the beauty of a woman of forty, wore her pearl necklace clasped with the famous Discreto, to give the lie to slander.

Fully to understand the scene, it is necessary to remark that Paul and Natalie sat by the fire on a little sofa, and never listened to one word of the guardian's accounts. One as much a child as the other, both equally happy, he in his hopes, she in her expectant curiosity, seeing life one calm blue heaven, rich, young, and in love, they never ceased whispering in each other's ears. Paul, already regarding his passion as legalized, amused himself with kissing the tips of Natalie's fingers, or just touching her snowy shoulders or her hair, hiding the raptures of these illicit joys from every eye. Natalie was playing with a fan of peacock feathers, a gift from Paul—a luckless omen in love, if we may accept the superstitious belief of some countries, as fatal as that of scissors, or any other cutting instrument, which is based, no doubt, on some association with the mythological Fates.

Madame Evangelista, sitting by the notaries, paid the closest attention to the reading of the two documents. After hearing the schedule of her accounts, very learnedly drawn out by Solonet, which showed a reduction of the three millions and some hundred thousand francs left by Monsieur Evangelista,

to the famous eleven hundred and fifty-six thousand francs constituting Natalie's portion, she called out to the young couple—

“Come, listen, children ; this is your marriage-contract.”

The clerk drank a glass of *eau de sucré*—sugared water ; Solonet and Mathias blew their noses ; Paul and Natalie looked at the four personages, listened to the preamble, and then began to talk together again. The statements of revenues ; the settlement of the whole estate on either party in the event of the other's death without issue ; the bequest, according to law, of one-quarter of the whole property absolutely to the wife, and of the interest of one-quarter more, however many children should survive ; the schedule of the property held in common ; the gift of the diamonds on the wife's part, and of the books and horses on the husband's—all passed without remark. Then came the settlement for the entail. And when everything had been read, and there was nothing to be done but to sign, Madame Evangelista asked what would be the effect of the entail.

“The entailed estate, madame, is inalienable ; it is property separated from the general estate of the married pair, and reserved for the eldest son of the house from generation to generation, without his being thereby deprived of his share of the rest of the property.”

“And what are the consequences to my daughter ?” she asked. Maître Mathias, incapable of disguising the truth, made reply—

“Madame, the entail being an inheritance derived from both fortunes, if the wife should be the first to die, and leaves one or several children, one of them a boy, Monsieur le Comte de Manerville will account to them for no more than three hundred and fifty-six thousand francs, from which he will deduct his one absolute fourth, and the fourth part of the interest of the residue. Thus their claim on him is reduced to about a hundred and sixty thousand francs independently of

his share of profits on the common stock, the sums he could claim, etc. In the contrary case, if he should die first, leaving a son or sons, Madame de Manerville would be entitled to no more than three hundred and fifty-six thousand francs, to her share of all of Monsieur de Manerville's estate that is not included in the entail, to the restitution of her diamonds, and her portion of the common stock."

The results of Maître Mathias' profound policy were now amply evident.

"My daughter is ruined," said Evangelista in a low voice.

The lawyers both heard her exclamation.

"Is it ruin," said Maître Mathias in an undertone, "to establish an indestructible fortune for her family in the future?"

As he saw the expression of his client's face, the younger notary thought it necessary to state the sum of the disaster in figures.

"We wanted to get three hundred thousand francs out of them, and they have evidently succeeded in getting eight hundred thousand out of us; the balance to their advantage on the contract is a loss of four hundred thousand francs to us for the benefit of the children. We must break it off or go on," he added to Madame Evangelista.

No words could describe the silence, though brief, that ensued. Mathias triumphantly awaited the signature of the two persons who had hoped to plunder his client. Natalie, incapable of understanding that she was bereft of half of her fortune, and Paul, not knowing that the house of Manerville was acquiring it, sat laughing and talking as before. Solonet and Madame Evangelista looked at each other, he concealing his indifference, she disguising a myriad angry feelings.

After suffering from terrible remorse, and regarding Paul as the cause of her dishonesty, the widow had made up her mind to certain discreditable manœuvres to cast the blunders of her guardianship on his shoulders, making him her victim. And now, in an instant, she had discovered that, instead of tri-

umphing, she was overthrown, and that the real victim was her daughter. Thus guilty to no purpose, she was the dupe of an honest old man, whose esteem she had doubtless sacrificed. Was it not her own secret conduct that had inspired the stipulations insisted on by Mathias?

Hideous thought! Mathias had, doubtless, told Paul.

If he had not yet spoken, as soon as the contract should be signed that old wolf would warn his client of the dangers he had run and escaped, if it were only to gather the praises to which everybody is open. Would he not put him on his guard against a woman so astute as to have joined such an ignoble conspiracy? Would he not undermine the influence she had acquired over her son-in-law? And weak natures, once warned, turn obstinate, and never reconsider the circumstances.

So all was lost!

On the day when the discussion was opened, she had trusted to Paul's feebleness and the impossibility of his retreating after advancing so far. And now it was she who had tied her own hands. Paul, three months since, would not have had many obstacles to surmount to break off the marriage; now, all Bordeaux knew that the lawyers had, two months ago, smoothed away every difficulty. The banns were published; the wedding was fixed for the next day but one. The friends of both families, all the town were arriving, dressed for the ball—how could she announce a postponement? The cause of the rupture would become known, the unblemished honesty of Maître Mathias would gain credence, his story would be believed in preference to hers. The laugh would be against the Evangelistas, of whom so many were envious. She must yield!

These painfully accurate reflections fell on Madame Evangelista like a waterspout and crushed her brain. Though she maintained a diplomatic impassibility, her chin showed the nervous jerking by which Catherine II. betrayed her fury one day when, sitting on her throne and surrounded by her Court,

she was defied by the young King of Sweden under almost similar circumstances. Solonet noted the spasmodic movement of the muscles that proclaimed a mortal hatred, a storm without a sound or a lightning-flash; and in fact, at that moment, the widow had sworn such hatred of her son-in-law, such an implacable feud as the Arabs have left the germs of in the atmosphere of Spain.

"Monsieur," said she to her notary, "you called this a rigmarole—it seems to me that nothing can be clearer."

"Madame, allow me——"

"Monsieur," she went on, without listening to Solonet, "if you did not understand the upshot of this bargain at the time of our former discussion, it is at least extraordinary that you should not have perceived it in the retirement of your study. It cannot be from incapacity."

The young man led her into the adjoining room, saying to himself—

"More than a thousand crowns are due to me for the schedule of accounts, and a thousand more for the contract; six thousand francs I can make over the sale of the house—fifteen thousand francs in all. We must keep our temper."

He shut the door, gave Madame Evangelista the cold look of a man of business, guessing the feelings that agitated her, and said—

"Madame, how, when I have perhaps overstepped in your behalf the due limits of finesse, can you repay my devotion by such a speech?"

"But, monsieur——"

"Madame, I did not, it is true, fully estimate the amount of our surrender; but if you do not care to have Count Paul for your son-in-law, are you obliged to agree? The contract is not signed. Give your ball and postpone the signing. It is better to take in all Bordeaux than to be taken in yourself."

"And what excuse can I make to all the world—already prejudiced against us—to account for this delay?"

"A blunder in Paris, a document missing," said Solonet.

"But the land that has been purchased?"

"Monsieur de Manerville will find plenty of matches with money."

"He! Oh, he will lose nothing; we are losing everything on our side."

"You," said Solonet, "may have a count, a better bargain, if the title is the great point of this match in your eyes."

"No, no; we cannot throw our honor overboard in that fashion! I am caught in a trap, monsieur. All Bordeaux would ring with it to-morrow. We have solemnly pledged ourselves."

"You wish Mademoiselle Natalie to be happy?" asked Solonet.

"That is the chief thing."

"In France," said the lawyer, "does not being happy mean being mistress of the hearth? She will lead that nin-compoop Manerville by the nose. He is so stupid that he has seen nothing. Even if he should distrust you, he will still believe in his wife. And are not you and his wife one? Count Paul's fate still lies in your hands."

"If you should be speaking truly, I do not know what I could refuse you!" she exclaimed, with delight that glowed in her eyes.

"Come in again, then, madame," said Solonet, understanding his client. "But, above all, listen to what I say; you may regard me as incapable afterward if you please."

"My dear friend," said the young lawyer to Mathias, as he re-entered the room, "for all your skill you have failed to foresee the contingency of Monsieur de Manerville's death without issue, or, again, that of his leaving none but daughters. In either of those cases the entail would give rise to lawsuits with other Manervilles, for plenty would crop up, do not doubt it for a moment. It strikes me, therefore, as desirable to stipulate that in the former case the entailed property should

be included in the general estate settled by each on either, and in the second that the entail should be canceled as null and void. It is an agreement solely affecting the intending wife."

"The clause seems to me perfectly fair," said Mathias. "As to its ratification, Monsieur le Comte will make the necessary arrangements with the Court of Chancery, no doubt, if requisite."

The younger notary took a pen and wrote in on the margin this ominous clause, to which Paul and Natalie paid no attention. Madame Evangelista sat with downcast eyes while it was read by Maître Mathias.

"Now to sign," said the mother.

The strong voice which she controlled betrayed vehement excitement. She had just said to herself—

"No, my daughter shall not be ruined—but he shall! My daughter shall have his name, title, and fortune. If Natalie should ever discover that she does not love her husband, if some day she should love another man more passionately—Paul will be exiled from France, and my daughter will be free, happy, and rich."

Though Maître Mathias was expert in the analysis of interests, he had no skill in analyzing human passions. He accepted the lady's speech as an honorable surrender, instead of seeing that it was a declaration of war. While Solonet and his clerk took care that Natalie signed in full at the foot of every document—a business that required some time—Mathias took Paul aside and explained to him the bearing of the clauses which he had introduced to save him from inevitable ruin.

"You have a mortgage on this house for a hundred and fifty thousand francs," he said in conclusion, "and we foreclose to-morrow. I have at my office the securities in the Funds, which I have taken care to place in your wife's name. Everything is quite regular. But the contract includes a

receipt for the sum represented by the diamonds; ask for them. Business is business. Diamonds are just now going up in the market; they may go down again. Your purchase of the lands of Auzac and Saint-Froult justifies you in turning everything into money so as not to touch your wife's income. So, no false pride, Monsieur le Comte. The first payment is to be made after the formalities are concluded; use the diamonds for that purpose; it amounts to two hundred thousand francs. You will have the mortgage value of this house for the second call, and the income on the entailed property will help you to pay off the remainder. If only you are firm enough to spend no more than fifty thousand francs for the first three years, you will recoup the two hundred thousand francs you now owe. If you plant vines on the hill-slopes of Saint-Froult, you may raise the returns to twenty-six thousand francs. Thus the entailed property, without including your house in Paris, will some day be worth fifty thousand francs a year—one of the finest estates I know of. And so you will have married very handsomely."

Paul pressed his old friend's hands with warm affection. The gesture did not escape Madame Evangelista, who came to hand the pen to Paul. Her suspicion was now certainty; she was convinced that Paul and Mathias had an understanding. Surges of blood, hot with rage and hatred, choked her heart. Paul was warned!

After ascertaining that every clause was duly signed, that the three contracting parties had initialed the bottom of every page with their usual sign-manual, Maître Mathias looked first at his client and then at Madame Evangelista, and observing that Paul did not ask for the diamonds, he said—

"I suppose there will be no question as to the delivery of the diamonds now that you are but one family?"

"It would, no doubt, be in order that Madame Evangelista should surrender them. Monsieur de Manerville has given his discharge for the balance of the trust values, and no one

can tell who may die or live," said Maître Solonet, who thought this an opportunity for inciting his client against her son-in-law.

"Oh, my dear mother, it would be an affront to us if you did so!" cried Paul. "*Summum jus, summa injuria*, monsieur," said he to Solonet.

"And I, on my part," said she, her hostile temper regarding Mathias' indirect demand as an insult, "if you do not accept the jewels, will tear up the contract."

She went out of the room in one of those bloodthirsty furies which only long for the chance of wrecking everything, and which, when that is impossible, rise to the pitch of frenzy.

"In heaven's name, take them," whispered Natalie. "My mother is angry; I will find out why this evening, and will tell you; we will pacify her."

Madame Evangelista, quite pleased at this first stroke of policy, kept on her necklace and earrings. She brought the rest of the jewels, valued by Élie Magus at a hundred and fifty thousand francs. Maître Mathias and Solonet, though accustomed to handling family diamonds, exclaimed at the beauty of these jewels as they examined the contents of the cases.

"You will lose nothing of mademoiselle's fortune, Monsieur le Comte," said Solonet, and Paul reddened.

"Ay," said Mathias, "these jewels will certainly pay the first installment of the newly purchased land."

"And the expenses of the contract," said Solonet.

Hatred, like love, is fed on the merest trifles. Everything adds to it. Just as the one we love can do no wrong, the one we hate can do nothing right. Madame Evangelista scorned the hesitancy to which a natural reluctance gave rise in Paul as affected airs; while he, not knowing what to do with the jewel-cases, would have been glad to throw them out of the window. Madame Evangelista, seeing his embarrassment, fixed her eyes on him in a way which seemed to say: "Take them out of my sight!"

"My dear Natalie," said Paul to his fiancée, "put the jewels away yourself; they are yours; I make them a present to you."

Natalie put them into the drawers of a cabinet. At this instant the clatter of carriages and the voices of the guests waiting in the adjoining rooms required Natalie and her mother to appear among them. The rooms were immediately filled, and the ball began.

"Take advantage of the honeymoon to sell your diamonds," said the old notary to Paul, as he withdrew.

While waiting for the dancing to begin, everybody was discussing the marriage in lowered tones, some of the company expressing doubts as to the future prospects of the engaged couple.

"Is it quite settled?" said one of the magnates of the town to Madame Evangelista.

"We have had so many papers to read and hear read that we are late; but we may be excused," replied she.

"For my part, I heard nothing," said Natalie, taking Paul's hand to open the ball.

"Both those young people like extravagance, and it will not be the mother that will check them," said a dowager.

"But they have created an entail, I hear, of fifty thousand francs a year."

"Pooh!"

"I see that our good Maître Mathias has had a finger in the pie. And certainly, if that is the case, the worthy man will have done his best to save the future fortunes of the family."

"Natalie is too handsome not to be a desperate flirt. By the time she has been married two years, I will not answer for it that Manerville will not be miserable in his home," remarked a young wife.

"What, the peas will be 'snicked,' you think?" replied Maître Solonet.

"He needed no more than that tall pole," said a young lady.

"Does it not strike you that Madame Evangelista is not best pleased?"

"Well, my dear, I have just been told that she has hardly twenty-five thousand francs a year, and what is that for her?"

"Beggary, my dear."

"Yes, she has stripped herself for her daughter. Monsieur has been exacting——"

"Beyond conception!" said Solonet. "But he is to be a peer of France. The Maulincours and the Vidame de Pamiers* will help him on; he belongs to the Faubourg Saint-Germain."

"Oh, he visits there, that is all," said a lady, who had wanted him for her son-in-law. "Mademoiselle Evangelista, a merchant's daughter, will certainly not open the doors of the Chapter of Cologne to him."

"She is grand-niece to the Duc de Casa-Real."

"On the female side!"

All this tittle-tattle was soon exhausted. The gamblers sat down to cards, the young people danced, supper was served, and the turmoil of festivity was not silenced till morning, when the first streaks of dawn shone pale through the windows.

After taking leave of Paul, who was the last to leave, Madame Evangelista went up to her daughter's room, for her own had been demolished by the builder to enlarge the ballroom. Though Natalie and her mother were dying for sleep, they spoke a few words.

"Tell me, darling mother, what is the matter?"

"My dear, I discovered this evening how far a mother's love may carry her. You know nothing of affairs, and you have no idea to what suspicions my honesty lies exposed.

* See "The Thirteen."

However, I have trodden my pride underfoot ; your happiness and our honor were at stake."

"As concerned the diamonds, you mean? He wept over it, poor boy ! He would not take them ; I have them."

"Well, go to sleep, dearest child. We will talk business when we wake ; for we have business—and now there is a third to come between us," and she sighed.

"Indeed, dear mother, Paul will never stand in the way of our happiness," said Natalie, and she went to sleep.

"Poor child, she does not know that the man has ruined her !"

Madame Evangelista was now seized in the grip of the first promptings of that avarice to which old folk at last fall a prey. She was determined to replace, for her daughter's benefit, the whole of the fortune left by her husband. She regarded her honor as pledged to this restitution. Her affection for Natalie made her in an instant as close a calculator in money matters as she had hitherto been a reckless spendthrift. She proposed to invest her capital in land after placing part of it in the State Funds, purchasable at that time for about eighty francs.

A passion not infrequently produces a complete change of character ; the tattler turns diplomatic, the coward is suddenly brave. Hatred made the prodigal Madame Evangelista turn parsimonious. Money might help her in the schemes of revenge, as yet vague and ill-defined, which she proposed to elaborate. She went to sleep, saying to herself—

"To-morrow !" and by an unexplained phenomenon, of which the effects are well known to philosophers, her brain during sleep worked out her idea, threw light on her plans, organized them, and hit on a way of ruling over Paul's life, devising a scheme which she began to work out on the very next day.

Though the excitement of the evening had driven away certain anxious thoughts which had now and again invaded

Paul, when he was alone once more and in bed they returned to torment him.

"It would seem," said he to himself, "that, but for that worthy Mathias, my mother-in-law would have taken me in. Is it credible? What interest could she have had in cheating me? Are we not to unite our incomes and live together? After all, what is there to be anxious about? In a few days Natalie will be my wife, our interests are clearly defined, nothing can sever us. On we go! At the same time, I will be on my guard. If Mathias should prove to be right—well, I am not obliged to marry my mother-in-law," and so thinking fell asleep.

In this second contest, Paul's future prospects had been entirely altered without his being aware of it. Of the two women he was marrying, far the cleverer had become his mortal enemy, and was bent on separating her own interests from his. Being incapable of appreciating the difference that the fact of her creole birth made between his mother-in-law's character and that of other women, he was still less able to measure her immense cleverness.

The creole woman is a being apart, deriving her intellect from Europe, and from the Tropics her vehemently illogical passions, while she is Indian in the apathetic indifference with which she accepts good or evil as it comes; a gracious nature too, but dangerous, as a child is when it is not kept in order. Like a child, this woman must have everything she wishes for, and at once; like a child, she would set a house on fire to boil an egg. In her flaccid every-day mood she thinks of nothing; when she is in a passion she thinks of everything. There is in her nature some touch of the perfidy caught from the negroes among whom she has lived from the cradle, but she is artless too, as they are. Like them, and like children, she can wish persistently for one thing with ever-growing intensity of desire, and brood over an idea till it hatches out. It is a nature strangely compounded of good and evil qualities;

and in Madame Evangelista it was strengthened by the Spanish temper, over which French manners had laid the polish of their veneer.

This nature, which had lain dormant in happiness for sixteen years, and had since found occupation in the frivolities of fashion, had discovered its own force under the first impulse of hatred, and flared up like a conflagration; it had broken out at a stage in her life when a woman, bereft of what is dearest to her, craves some new material to feed the energies that are consuming her.

For three days longer Natalie would remain under her mother's influence. So Madame Evangelista, though vanquished, had still a day before her, the last her child would spend with her mother. By a single word the creole might color the lives of these two beings whose fate it was to walk hand in hand through the thickets and highways of Paris society—for Natalie had a blind belief in her mother. What far-reaching importance would a hint of advice have on a mind thus prepared! The whole future might be modified by a sentence. No code, no human constitution, can forefend the moral crime of killing by a word. That is the weak point of social forms of justice. That is where the difference lies between the world of fashion and the people; these are outspoken, those are hypocrites; these snatch the knife, those use the poison of words and suggestions; these are punished with death, those sin with impunity.

At about noon next day, Madame Evangelista was half sitting, half reclining on Natalie's bed. At this waking hour they were playing and petting each other with fond caresses, recalling the happy memories of their life together, during which no discord had troubled the harmony of their feelings, the agreement of their ideas, or the perfect union of their pleasures.

"Poor dear child," said the mother, shedding genuine tears, "I cannot bear to think that, after having had your own

way all your life, to-morrow evening you will be bound to a man whom you must obey ! ”

“ Oh, my dear mother, as to obeying him ! ” said Natalie, with a little willful nod expressive of pretty rebellion. “ You laugh ! ” she went on, “ but my father always indulged your fancies. And why ? Because he loved you. Shall not I be loved ? ”

“ Yes, Paul is in love with you. But if a married woman is not careful, nothing evaporates so quickly as conjugal affection. The influence a wife may preserve over her husband depends on the first steps in married life, and you will want good advice.”

“ But you will be with us.”

“ Perhaps, my dear child. Last evening, during the ball, I very seriously considered the risks of our being together. If my presence were to be disadvantageous to you, if the little details by which you must gradually confirm your authority as a wife should be ascribed to my influence, your home would become a hell. At the first frown on your husband’s brow, should not I, so proud as I am, instantly quit the house ? If I am to leave it sooner or later, in my opinion, I had better never enter it. I could not forgive your husband if he disunited us.

“ On the other hand, when you are the mistress, when your husband is to you what your father was to me, there will be less fear of any such misfortune. Although such a policy must be painful to a heart so young and tender as yours, it is indispensable for your happiness that you should be the absolute sovereign of your home.”

“ Why, then, dear mother, did you say I was to obey him ? ”

“ Dear little girl, to enable a woman to command, she must seem always to do what her husband wishes. If you did not know that, you might wreck your future life by an untimely rebellion. Paul is a weak man ; he might come

under the influence of a friend, nay, he might fall under the control of a woman, and you would feel the effects of their influence. Forefend such misfortunes by being mistress yourself. Will it not be better that you should govern him than that any one else should?"

"No doubt," said Natalie. "I could only aim at his happiness."

"And it certainly is my part, dear child, to think only of yours, and to endeavor that, in so serious a matter, you should not find yourself without a compass in the midst of the shoals you must navigate."

"But, my darling mother, are we not both of us firm enough to remain together under his roof without provoking the frowns you seem so much to dread? Paul is fond of you, mamma."

"Oh, he fears me more than he loves me. Watch him narrowly to-day when I tell him that I shall leave you to go to Paris without me, and, however carefully he may try to conceal his feelings, you will see his secret satisfaction in his face."

"But why?" said Natalie.

"Why, my child? I am like Saint-John-Chrysostom—I will tell him why, and before you."

"But since I am marrying him on the express condition that you and I are not to part?" said Natalie.

"Our separation has become necessary," Madame Evangelista replied. "Several considerations affect my future prospects. I am very poor. You will have a splendid life in Paris; I could not live with you suitably without exhausting the little possessions that remain to me; whereas, by living at Lanstrac, I can take care of your interests and reconstitute my own fortune by economy."

"You, mother! you economize?" cried Natalie, laughing. "Come, do not be a grandmother yet. What, would you part from me for such a reason as that? Dear mother, Paul may

seem to you just a little stupid, but at least he is perfectly disinterested——”

“Well,” replied Madame Evangelista, in a tone big with comment, which made Natalie’s heart beat, “the discussion of the contract had made me suspicious and suggested some doubts to my mind. But do not be uneasy, dearest child,” she went on, putting her arm round the girl’s neck and clasping her closely, “I will not leave you alone for long. When my return to you can give him no umbrage, when Paul has learned to judge me truly, we will go back to our snug little life again, our evening chats——”

“Why, mother, can you live without your Ninie?” she asked, caressingly.

“Yes, my darling, because I shall be living for you. Will not my motherly heart be constantly rejoiced by the idea that I am contributing, as I ought, to your fortune and your husband’s?”

“But, my dear, adorable mother, am I to be alone there with Paul? At once? Quite alone? What will become of me? What will happen? What ought I to do—or not to do?”

“Poor child, do you think I mean to desert you forthwith at the first battle? We will write to each other three times a week, like two lovers, and thus we shall always live in each other’s heart. Nothing can happen to you that I shall not know, and I will protect you against all evil. And beside, it would be too ridiculous that I should not go to visit you; that would cast a reflection on your husband; I shall always spend a month or two with you in Paris——”

“Alone—alone with him, and at once!” cried Natalie in terror, interrupting her mother.

“Are you not to be his wife?”

“Yes, and I am quite content; but tell me at least how to behave. You, who did what you would with my father, know all about it, and I will obey you blindly.”


Madame Evangelista kissed her daughter's forehead ; she had been hoping and waiting for this request.

"My child, my advice must be adapted to the circumstances. Men are not all alike. The lion and the frog are less dissimilar than one man as compared with another, morally speaking. Do I know what will happen to you to-morrow ? I can only give you general instructions as to your usual plan of conduct."

"Dearest mother, tell me at once all you know."

"In the first place, my dear child, the cause of ruin to married women who would gladly retain their husband's heart—and," she added, as a parenthesis, "to retain their affection and to rule the man are one and the same thing—well, the chief cause of matrimonial differences lies in the unbroken companionship, which did not subsist in former days, and which was introduced into this country with the mania for family life. Ever since the Revolution vulgar notions have invaded aristocratic households. This misfortune is attributable to one of their writers, Rousseau, a base heretic, who had none but reactionary ideas, and who—how I know not—argued out the most irrational conclusions. He asserted that all women have the same rights and the same faculties; that under the conditions of social life the laws of Nature must be obeyed—as if the wife of a Spanish Grandee—as if you or I—had anything in common with a woman of the people. And since then women of rank have nursed their own children, have brought up their daughters, and lived at home.

"Life has thus been made so complicated that happiness is almost impossible ; for such an agreement of two characters as has enabled you and me to live together as friends is a rare exception. And perpetual friction is not less to be avoided between parents and children than between husband and wife. There are few natures in which love can survive in spite of omnipresence ; that miracle is the prerogative of God.



"So place the barriers of society between you and Paul; go to balls, to the opera, drive out in the morning, dine out in the evening, pay visits; do not give Paul more than a few minutes of your time. By this system you will never lose your value in his eyes. When two beings have nothing but sentiment to go through life on, they soon exhaust its resources, and ere long satiety and disgust ensue. Then, when once the sentiment is blighted, what is to be done? Make no mistake; when love is extinct, only indifference or contempt ever fills its place. So be always fresh and new to him. If he bores you—that may occur—at any rate, never bore him. To submit to boredom on occasion is one of the conditions of every form of power. You will have no occasion to vary your happiness either by thrift in money matters or the management of a household; hence, if you do not lead your husband to share your outside pleasures, if you do not amuse him, in short, you will sink into the most crushing lethargy. Then begins the spleen of love. But we always love those who amuse us or make us happy. To give and to receive happiness are two systems of wifely conduct between which a gulf lies."

"Dear mother, I am listening, but I do not understand."

"If you love Paul so blindly as to do everything he desires, and if he makes you really happy, there is an end of it; you will never be the mistress, and the wisest precepts in the world will be of no use."

"That is rather clearer; but I learn the rule without knowing how to apply it," said Natalie, laughing. "Well, I have the theory, and practice will follow."

"My poor Ninie," said her mother, dropping a sincere tear as she thought of her daughter's marriage and pressed her to her heart, "events will strengthen your memory. In short, my Natalie," said she after a pause, during which they sat clasped in a sympathetic embrace, "you will learn that each of us, as a woman, has her destiny, just as every man has his

vocation. A woman is born to be a woman of fashion, the charming mistress of her house, just as a man is born to be a general or a poet. Your calling in life is to attract. And your education has fitted you for the world. In these days a woman ought to be brought up to grace a drawing-room, as of old she was brought up for the Gynæceum. You, child, were never made to be the mother of a family or a notable housekeeper.

"If you have children, I hope they will not come to spoil your figure as soon as you are married. Nothing can be more vulgar—and beside, it casts reflections on your husband's love for you. Well, if you have children two or three years hence, you will have nurses and tutors to bring them up. You must always be the great lady, representing the wealth and pleasures of the house; but only show your superiority in such things as flatter men's vanity, and hide any superiority you may acquire in serious matters."

"You frighten me, mamma!" cried Natalie. "How am I ever to remember all your instructions? How am I, heedless and childish as I know I am, to reckon on results and always reflect before acting?"

"My darling child, I am only telling you now what you would learn for yourself later, paying for experience by wretched mistakes, by misguided conduct, which would cause you many regrets and hamper your life."

"But how, then, am I to begin?" asked the handsome Natalie artlessly.

"Instinct will guide you," said her mother. "What Paul feels for you at this moment is far more desire than love; for the love to which desire gives rise is hope, and that which follows its gratification is realization. There, my dear, lies your power, there is the heart of the question. What woman is not loved the day before marriage? Be still loved the day after, and you will be loved for life. Paul is weak; he will be easily formed by habit; if he yields once, he will yield al-

ways. A woman not yet won may insist on anything. Do not commit the folly I have seen in so many wives, who, not knowing the importance of the first hours of their sovereignty, waste them in folly, in aimless absurdities. Make use of the dominion given you by your husband's first passion to accustom him to obey you. And to break him in, choose the most unreasonable thing possible, so as to gauge the extent of your power by the extent of his concession. What merit would there be in making him agree to what is reasonable? Would that be obeying you? 'Always take a bull by the horns,' says a Castilian proverb. When once he sees the uselessness of his weapons and his strength, he is conquered. If your husband commits a folly for your sake, you will master him."

"Good heavens! But why?"

"Because, my child, marriage is for life, and a husband is not like any other man. So never be so foolish as to give way in anything whatever. Always be strictly reserved in your speech and actions; you may even go to the point of coldness, for that may be modified at pleasure, while there is nothing beyond the most vehement expressions of love. A husband, my dear, is the only man to whom a woman must grant no license.

"And, after all, nothing is easier than to preserve your dignity. The simple words, 'Your wife must not or cannot do this thing or that,' is the great talisman. A woman's whole life is wrapped up in 'I will not!—I cannot!' 'I cannot' is the irresistible appeal of weakness which succumbs, weeps, and wins. 'I will not' is the last resort. It is the crowning effort of feminine strength; it should never be used but on great occasions. Success depends entirely on the way in which a woman uses these two words, works on them, and varies them.

"But there is a better method of rule than these, which sometimes involve a contest. I, my child, governed by faith,

If your husband believes in you, you may do anything. To inspire him with this religion, you must convince him that you understand him. And do not think that this is such an easy matter. A woman can always prove that she loves a man, but it is more difficult to get him to confess that she has understood him. I must tell you everything, my child; for, to you, life with all its complications, a life in which two wills are to be reconciled and harmonized, will begin to-morrow. Do you realize the difficulty? The best way to bring two wills into agreement is to take care that there is but one in the house. People often say that a woman makes trouble for herself by this inversion of the parts; but, my dear, the wife is thus in a position to command events instead of submitting to them, and that single advantage counterbalances every possible disadvantage."

Natalie kissed her mother's hands, on which she left her tears of gratitude. Like all women in whom physical passion does not fire the passion of the soul, she suddenly took in all the bearings of this lofty feminine policy. Still, like spoilt children who will never admit that they are beaten even by the soundest reasoning, but who reiterate their obstinate demands, she returned to the charge with one of those personal arguments that are suggested by the logical rectitude of children.

"My dear mother, a few days ago you said so much about the necessary arrangements for Paul's fortune, which you alone could manage; why have you changed your views in thus leaving us to ourselves?"

"I did not then know the extent of my indebtedness to you, nor how much I owed," replied her mother, who would not confess her secret. "Beside, in a year or two I can give you my answer.

"Now, Paul will be here directly. We must dress. Be as coaxing and sweet, you know, as you were that evening when we discussed that ill-starred contract, for to-day I am bent on

saving a relic of the family, and on giving you a thing to which I am superstitiously attached."

"What is that?"

"The Discreto."

Paul appeared at about four o'clock. Though, when addressing his mother, he did his utmost to seem gracious, Madame Evangelista saw on his brow the clouds which his cogitations of the night and reflections on waking had gathered there,

"Mathias has told him," thought she, vowing that she would undo the old lawyer's work.

"My dear boy," she said, "you have left your diamonds in the cabinet drawer, and I honestly confess that I never want to see the things again which so nearly raised a storm between us. Beside, as Mathias remarked, they must be sold to provide for the first installment of payment on the lands you have purchased."

"The diamonds are not mine," rejoined Paul. "I gave them to Natalie, so that when you see her wear them you may never more remember the trouble they have caused you."

Madame Evangelista took Paul's hand and pressed it cordially, while restraining a sentimental tear.

"Listen, my dear, good children," said she, looking at Natalie and Paul. "If this is so, I will propose to make a bargain with you. I am obliged to sell my pearl necklace and earrings. Yes, Paul; I will not invest a centime in an annuity; I do not forget my duties to you. Well, I confess my weakness, but to sell the Discreto seems to me to portend disaster. To part with a diamond known to have belonged to Philip II., to have graced his royal hand—a historical gem which the Duke of Alva played with for ten years on the hilt of his sword—no, it shall never be. Élie Magus valued my necklace and earrings at a hundred-odd thousand francs; let us exchange them for the jewels I have handed over to you to can-

cel my debts to my daughter ; you will gain a little, but what do I care ; I am not grasping. And then, Paul, out of your savings you can have the pleasure of procuring a diadem or hairpins for Natalie, a diamond at a time. Instead of having one of those fancy sets, trinkets which are in fashion only among second-rate people, your wife will thus have magnificent stones that will give her real pleasure. If something must be sold, is it not better to get rid of these old-fashioned jewels, and keep the really fine things in the family ? ”

“ But you, my dear mother,” said Paul.

“ I,” replied Madame Evangelista, “ I want nothing now. No, I am going to be your farm-bailiff at Lanstrac. Would it not be sheer folly to go to Paris just when I have to wind up my affairs here ? I am going to be avaricious for my grandchildren.”

“ Dear mother,” said Paul, much touched, “ ought I to accept this exchange without compensation ? ”

“ Dear heaven ! are you not my nearest and dearest ? Do you think that I shall find no happiness when I sit by my fire and say to myself : ‘ Natalie is gone in splendor to-night to the Duchesse de Berri’s ball. When she sees herself with my diamond at her throat, my earrings in her ears, she will have those little pleasures of self-satisfaction which add so much to a woman’s enjoyment, and make her gay and attractive.’ Nothing crushes a woman so much as the chafing of her vanity. I never saw a badly dressed woman look amiable and pleasant. Be honest, Paul ! we enjoy much more through the one we love than in any pleasure of our own.”

“ What on earth was Mathias driving at ? ” thought Paul.

“ Well, mother,” said he, in a low voice, “ I accept.”

“ I am quite overpowered,” said Natalie.

Just now Solonet came in with good news for his client. He had found two speculators of his acquaintance, builders, who were much tempted by the house, as the extent of the grounds afforded good building land.

"They are prepared to pay two hundred and fifty thousand francs," said he; "but if you are ready to sell, I could bring them up to three hundred thousand. You have two acres of garden."

"My husband paid two hundred thousand for the whole thing," said she, "so I agree; but you will not include the furniture or the mirrors."

"Ah, ha!" said Solonet, with a laugh, "you understand business."

"Alas! needs must," said she, with a sigh.

"I hear that a great many persons are coming to your midnight ceremony," said Solonet, who, finding himself in the way, bowed himself out.

Madame Evangelista went with him as far as the door of the outer drawing-room, and, seeing there was no fear of being overheard, said to him privately—

"I have now property representing two hundred and fifty thousand francs; if I get two hundred thousand francs for myself out of the price of the house, I can command a capital of four hundred and fifty thousand francs. I want to invest it to the best advantage, and I trust to you to do it. I shall most likely remain at Lanstrac."

The young lawyer kissed his client's hand with a bow of gratitude, for the widow's tone led him to believe that this alliance, strengthened by interest, might even go a little further.

"You may depend on me," said he. "I will find you trade investments, in which you will risk nothing, and make large profits."

"Well—till to-morrow," said she; "for you and Monsieur le Marquis de Gyas are going to sign for us."

"Why, dear mother, do you refuse to come with us to Paris?" asked Paul. "Natalie is as much vexed with me as if I were the cause of your determination."

"I have thought it well over, my children, and I should

be in your way. You would think yourselves obliged to include me as a third in everything you might do, and young people have notions of their own which I might involuntarily oppose. Go to Paris by yourselves. I do not propose to exercise over the Comtesse de Manerville the mild dominion I held over Natalie. I must leave her entirely to you. There are habits which she and I share, you see, Paul, and which must be broken. My influence must give way to yours. I wish you to be attached to me ; believe me, I have your interests at heart more than you think perhaps. Young husbands, sooner or later, are jealous of a wife's affection for her mother. Perhaps they are right. When you are entirely united, when love has amalgamated your souls into one—then, my dear boy, you will have no fears of an adverse influence when you see me under your roof.

“I know the world, men and things ; I have seen many a household rendered unhappy by the blind affection of a mother who made herself intolerable, as much to her daughter as to her son-in-law. The affection of old people is often petty and vexatious ; perhaps I should not succeed in effacing myself. I am weak enough to think myself handsome still ; some flatterers try to persuade me that I am lovable, and I might assume an inconvenient prominence. Let me make one more sacrifice to your happiness. I have given you my fortune ; well, now I surrender my last womanly vanities. Your good father Mathias is growing old ; he cannot look after your estates. I will constitute myself your bailiff. I shall make such occupation for myself as old folk must sooner or later fall back on ; then, when you need me, I will go to Paris and help in your plans of ambition.

“Come, Paul, be honest ; this arrangement is to your mind ? Answer.”

Paul would not admit it, but he was very glad to be free. The suspicions as to his mother-in-law's character, implanted in his mind by the old notary, were dispelled by this conver-

sation, which Madame Evangelista continued to the same effect.

"My mother was right," thought Natalie, who was watching Paul's expression. "He is really glad to see me parted from her. But why?"

Was not this *Why?* the first query of suspicion, and did it not add considerable weight to her mother's instructions?

There are some natures who, on the strength of a single proof, can believe in friendship. In such folk as these the North wind blows away clouds as fast as the West wind brings them up; they are content with effects, and do not look for the causes. Paul's was one of these essentially confiding characters, devoid of ill-feeling, and no less devoid of foresight. His weakness was the outcome of kindness and a belief in goodness in others, far more than of want of strength of mind.

Natalie was pensive and sad; she did not know how to do without her mother. Paul, with the sort of fatuity that love can produce, laughed at his bride's melancholy mood, promising himself that the pleasures of married life and the excitement of Paris would dissipate it. It was with marked satisfaction that Madame Evangelista encouraged Paul in his confidence, for the first condition of revenge is dissimulation. Overt hatred is powerless.

The creole lady had made two long strides already. Her daughter had possession of splendid jewels which had cost Paul two hundred thousand francs, and to which he would, no doubt, add more. Then, she was leaving the two young people to themselves, with no guidance but unregulated love. Thus she had laid the foundations of revenge of which her daughter knew nothing, though sooner or later she would be accessory to it.

Now, would Natalie love Paul? This was as yet an unanswered question, of which the issue would modify Madame Evangelista's schemes; for she was too sincerely fond of her

daughter not to be tender of her happiness. Thus Paul's future life depended on himself. If he could make his wife love him, he would be saved.

Finally, on the following night, after an evening spent with the four witnesses whom Madame Evangelista had invited to the lengthy dinner which followed the legal ceremony, at midnight the young couple and their friends attended mass by the light of blazing tapers in the presence of above a hundred curious spectators.

A wedding celebrated at night always seems of ill-omen; daylight is a symbol of life and enjoyment, and its happy augury is lacking. Ask the stanchest spirit the cause of this chill, why the dark vault depresses the nerves, why the sound of footsteps is so startling, why the cry of owls and bats is so strangely audible. Though there is no reason for alarm, every one quakes; darkness, the forecast of death, is crushing to the spirit.

Natalie, torn from her mother, was weeping. The girl was tormented by all the doubts which clutch the heart on the threshold of a new life, where, in spite of every promise of happiness, there are a thousand pitfalls for a woman's feet. She shivered with cold, and had to put on a cloak.

Madame Evangelista's manner and that of the young couple gave rise to comments among the elegant crowd that stood round the altar.

"Solonet tells me that the young people go off to Paris to-morrow morning alone."

"Madame Evangelista was to have gone to live with them."

"Count Paul has got rid of her?"

"What a mistake!" said the Marquise de Gyas. "The man who shuts his door on his mother-in-law opens it to a lover. Does he not know all that a mother is?"

"He has been very hard on Madame Evangelista. The poor woman has had to sell her house, and is going to live at Lanstrac."

"Natalie is very unhappy."

"Well, would you like to spend the day after your wedding on the highway?"

"It is very uncomfortable."

"I am glad I came," said another lady, "to convince myself of the necessity of surrounding a wedding with all the usual ceremonies and festivities, for this seems to me very cold and dismal. Indeed, if I were to tell the whole truth," she whispered, leaning over to her neighbor, "it strikes me as altogether uncanny."

Madame Evangelista took Natalie in her own carriage to Count Paul's house.

"Well, mother, it is all over——"

"Remember my advice, and you will be happy. Always be his wife, and not his mistress."

When Natalie had gone to her room, Madame Evangelista went through the little farce of throwing herself into her son-in-law's arms, and weeping on his shoulder. It was the only provincial detail Madame Evangelista had allowed herself; but she had her reasons. In the midst of her apparently wild and desperate tears and speeches, she extracted from Paul such concessions as a husband will always make.

The next day she saw the young people into their chaise, and accompanied them across the ferry over the Gironde. Natalie, in a word, had made her mother understand that if Paul had won in the game concerning the contract, her revenge was beginning. Natalie had already reduced her husband to perfect obedience.

CONCLUSION.

Five years after this, one afternoon in November, the Comte Paul de Manerville, wrapped in a cloak, with a bowed head, mysteriously arrived at the house of Monsieur Mathias at Bordeaux. The worthy man, too old now to attend business,

had sold his connection, and was peacefully ending his days in one of his houses.

Important business had taken him out at the time when his visitor called ; but his old housekeeper, warned of Paul's advent, showed him into the room that had belonged to Madame Mathias, who had died a year since.

Paul, tired out by a hurried journey, slept till late. The old man, on his return, came to look at his erstwhile client, and was satisfied to look at him lying asleep, as a mother looks at her child. Josette, the housekeeper, came in with her master and stood by the bedside, her hands on her hips.

"This day twelvemonth, Josette, when my dear wife breathed her last in this bed, I little thought of seeing Monsieur le Comte here looking like death."

"Poor gentleman ! he groans in his sleep," said Josette.

The old lawyer made no reply but "*Sac à papier !*" an innocent oath, which, from him, always represented the despair of a man of business in the face of some insuperable dilemma.

"At any rate," thought he, "I have saved the freehold of Lanstrac, Auzac, Saint-Froult, and his town-house here."

Mathias counted on his fingers and exclaimed: "Five years ! Yes, it is five years this very month since his old aunt, now deceased, the venerable Madame de Maulincour, asked on his behalf for the hand of that little crocodile in woman's skirts who has managed to ruin him—as I knew she would !"

After looking at the young man for some time, the good old man, now very gouty, went away, leaning on his stick, to walk slowly up and down his little garden. At nine o'clock supper was served, for the old man supped ; and he was not a little surprised to see Paul come in with a calm brow and an unruffled expression, though perceptibly altered. Though at three-and-thirty the Comte de Manerville looked forty, the change was due solely to mental shocks ; physically he was in

good health. He went up to his old friend, took his hands, and pressed them affectionately, saying:

"Dear, good Maitre Mathias! And you have had your troubles!"

"Mine were in the course of nature, Monsieur le Comte, but yours——"

"We will talk over mine presently at supper," replied de Manerville.

"If I had not a son high up in the law, and a married daughter," said the worthy man, "believe me, Monsieur le Comte, you would have found something more than bare hospitality from old Mathias. How is it that you have come to Bordeaux just at the time when you may read on every wall bills announcing the seizure and sale of the farms of le Grassol and le Guadet, of the vine-land of Bellerose and your house here? I cannot possibly express my grief on seeing those huge posters—I, who for forty years took as much care of your estates as if they were my own; I, who, when I was third clerk under Monsieur Chesneau, my predecessor, transacted the purchase for your mother, and in my young clerk's hand engrossed the deed of sale on parchment; I, who have the title-deeds safe in my successor's office; I, who made out all the accounts. Why, I remember you when so high——" and the old man held his hand two feet from the floor.

"After being a notary for more than forty years, to see my name printed as large as life in the face of Israel, in the announcement of the seizure and the disposal of the property—you cannot imagine the pain it gives me. As I go along the street and see the folk all reading those horrible yellow bills, I am as much ashamed as if my own ruin and honor were involved. And there are a pack of idiots who spell it all out at the top of their voices on purpose to attract idlers, and they add the most ridiculous comments.

"Are you not master of your own? Your father ran through two fortunes before making the one he left you, and

you would not be a Manerville if you did not tread in his steps.

"And beside, the seizure of real property is foreseen in the Code, and provided for under a special *capitulum*; you are in a position recognized by law. If I were not a white-headed old man, only waiting for a nudge to push me into the grave, I would thrash the men who stand staring at such abominations—'At the suit of Madame Natalie Evangelista, wife of Paul François Joseph Comte de Manerville, of separate estate by the ruling of the lower Court of the Department of the Seine,' and so forth."

"Yes," said Paul, "and now separate in bed and board——"

"Indeed!" said the old man.

"Oh! against Natalie's will," said the count quickly. "I had to deceive her. She does not know that I am going away."

"Going away?"

"My passage is taken; I sail on the Belle-Amélie for Calcutta."

"In two days!" said Mathias. "Then we meet no more, Monsieur le Comte."

"You are but seventy-three, my dear Mathias, and you have the gout, an assurance of old age. When I come back I shall find you just where you are. Your sound brain and heart will be as good as ever; you will help me to rebuild the ruined home. I mean to make a fine fortune in seven years. On my return I shall only be forty. At that age everything is still possible."

"You, Monsieur le Comte!" exclaimed Mathias, with a gesture of amazement. "You are going into trade! What are you thinking of?"

"I am no longer Monsieur le Comte, dear Mathias. I have taken my passage in the name of Camille, a Christian name of my mother's. And I have some connections which may

enable me to make a fortune in other ways. Trade will be my last resource. Also, I am starting with a large enough sum of money to allow of my tempting fortune on a grand scale."

"Where is that money?"

"A friend will send it to me."

The old man dropped his fork at the sound of the word *friend*, not out of irony or surprise; his face expressed his grief at finding Paul under the influence of a delusion, for his eye saw a void where the count perceived a solid plank.

"I have been in a notary's office more than fifty years," said he, "and I never knew a ruined man who had friends willing to lend him money."

"You do not know de Marsay. At this minute, while I speak to you, I am perfectly certain that he has sold out of the Funds if it was necessary, and to-morrow you will receive a bill of exchange for fifty thousand crowns."

"I only hope so. But then could not this friend have set your affairs straight? You could have lived quietly at Lansrac for five or six years on Madame la Comtesse's income."

"And would an assignment have paid fifteen hundred thousand francs of debts, of which my wife's share was five hundred and fifty thousand?"

"And how, in four years, have you managed to owe fourteen hundred and fifty thousand francs?"

"Nothing can be plainer, my good friend. Did I not make the diamonds a present to my wife? Did I not spend the hundred and fifty thousand francs that came to us from the sale of Madame Evangelista's house in redecorating my house in Paris? Had I not to pay the price of the land we purchased, and of the legal business of my marriage-contract? Finally, had I not to sell Natalie's forty thousand francs a year in the Funds to pay for d'Auzac and Saint-Froult? We sold at 87, so I was in debt about two hundred thousand francs within a month of my marriage.

"An income was left of sixty-seven thousand francs, and we have regularly spent two hundred thousand francs a year beyond it. To these nine hundred thousand francs add certain money-lenders' interest, and you will easily find it a million."

"Brrrr," said the old lawyer. "And then?"

"Well, I wished at once to make up the set of jewels for my wife, of which she already had the pearl necklace and the Discreto clasp—a family jewel—and her mother's earrings. I paid a hundred thousand francs for a diadem of wheat-ears. There you see eleven hundred thousand francs. Then I owe my wife the whole of her fortune, amounting to three hundred and fifty-six thousand francs settled on her."

"But then," said Mathias, "if Madame la Comtesse had pledged her diamonds and you your securities, you would have, by my calculations, three hundred thousand with which to pacify your creditors——"

"When a man is down, Mathias; when his estates are loaded with mortgages; when his wife is the first creditor for her settlement; when, to crown all, he is exposed to having writs against him for notes of hand to the tune of a hundred thousand francs—to be paid off, I hope, by good prices at the sales—nothing can be done. And the cost of conveyancing!"

"Frightful!" said the lawyer.

"The distraint has happily taken the form of a voluntary sale, which will mitigate the flare."

"And you are selling Bellerose with the wines of 1825 in the cellars?"

"I cannot help myself."

"Bellerose is worth six hundred thousand francs."

"Natalie will buy it in by my advice."

"Sixteen thousand francs in ordinary years—and such a season as 1825! I will run Bellerose up to seven hundred thousand francs myself, and each of the farms up to a hundred and twenty thousand."

"So much the better; then I can clear myself if my house in the town fetches two hundred thousand."

"Solonet will pay a little more for it; he has a fancy for it. He is retiring on a hundred-odd thousand a year, which he has made in gambling in *trois-six*. He has sold his business for three hundred thousand francs, and is marrying a rich mulatto. Gods knows where she got her money, but they say she has millions. A notary gambling in *trois-six*! A notary marrying a mulatto! What times these are! It was he, they say, who looked after your mother-in-law's investments."

"She has greatly improved Lanstrac, and taken good care of the land; she has regularly paid her rent."

"I should never have believed her capable of behaving so."

"She is so kind and devoted. She always paid Natalie's debts when she came to spend three months in Paris."

"So she very well might, she lives on Lanstrac," said Mathias. "She! Turned thrifty! What a miracle! She has just bought the estate of Grainrouge, lying between Lanstrac and Grassol, so that if she prolongs the avenue from Lanstrac down to the high road you can drive a league and a half through your own grounds. She paid a hundred thousand francs down for Grainrouge, which is worth a thousand crowns a year in cash rents."

"She is still handsome," said Paul. "Country life keeps her young. I will not go to take leave of her; she would bleed herself for me."

"You would waste your time; she has gone to Paris. She probably arrived just as you left."

"She has, of course, heard of the sale of the land, and has rushed to my assistance. I have no right to complain of life. I am loved as well as any man can be in this world, loved by two women who vie with each other in their devotion to me. They were jealous of each other; the daughter reproached her mother for being too fond of me, and the mother found fault

with her daughter for her extravagance. This affection has been my ruin. How can a man help gratifying the lightest wish of the woman he loves? How can he protect himself? And, on the other hand, how can he accept self-sacrifice? We could, to be sure, pay up with my fortune and come to live at Lanstrac—but I would rather go to India and make my fortune than tear Natalie from the life she loves. It was I myself who proposed to her a separation of goods. Women are angels who ought never to be mixed up with the business of life."

Old Mathias listened to Paul with an expression of surprise and doubt.

"You have no children?" said he.

"Happily!" replied Paul.

"Well, I view marriage in a different light," replied the old notary quite simply. "In my opinion, a wife ought to share her husband's lot for good or ill. I have heard that young married people who are too much like lovers have no families. Is pleasure then the only end of marriage? Is it not rather the happiness of family life? Still, you were but eight-and-twenty and the countess no more than twenty; it was excusable that you should think only of love-making. At the same time, the terms of your marriage-contract, and your name—you will think me grossly lawyer-like—required you to begin by having a fine handsome boy. Yes, Monsieur le Comte, and if you had daughters, you ought not to have stopped till you had a male heir to succeed you in the entail.

"Was Mademoiselle Evangelista delicate? Was there anything to fear for her in motherhood? You will say that is very old-fashioned and antiquated; but in noble families, Monsieur le Comte, a legitimate wife ought to have children and bring them up well. As the Duchesse de Sully said—the wife of the great Sully—a wife is not a means of pleasure, but the honor and virtue of the household."

"You do not know what women are, my dear Mathias," said Paul. "To be happy, a man must love his wife as she chooses to be loved. And is it not rather brutal to deprive a woman so early of her charms and spoil her beauty before she has really enjoyed it?"

"If you had had a family, the mother would have checked the wife's dissipation; she would more than likely have stayed at home——"

"If you were in the right, my good friend," said Paul, with a frown, "I should be still more unhappy. Do not aggravate my misery by moralizing over my ruin; let me depart without any after bitterness."

Next day Mathias received a bill payable at sight for a hundred and fifty thousand francs, signed by de Marsay.

"You see," said Paul, "he does not write me a word. Henri's is the most perfectly imperfect, the most unconventionally noble nature I have ever met with. If you could but know how superior this man—who is still young—rises above feeling and interest, and what a great politician he is, you, like me, would be amazed to find what a warm heart he has."

Mathias tried to reason Paul out of his purpose, but it was irrevocable, and justified by so many practical reasons, that the old notary made no further attempt to detain his client.

Rarely enough does a vessel in cargo sail punctually to the day; but by an accident disastrous to Paul, the wind being favorable, the *Belle-Amélie* was to sail on the morrow. At the moment of departure the landing-stage is always crowded with relations, friends, and idlers. Among these, as it happened, were several personally acquainted with Manerville. His ruin had made him as famous now as he had once been for his fortune, so there was a stir of curiosity. Every one had some remark to make.

The old man had escorted Paul to the wharf, and he must have suffered keenly as he heard some of the comments.

"Who would recognize in the man you see there with old Mathias the dandy who used to be called Sweet-pea, and who was the oracle of fashion here at Bordeaux five years since?"

"What, can that fat little man in an alpaca overcoat, looking like a coachman, be the Comte Paul de Manerville?"

"Yes, my dear, the man who married Mademoiselle Evangelista. There he is ruined, without a sou to his name, going to the Indies to look for the roc's egg."

"But how was he ruined? He was so rich!"

"Paris—women—the Bourse—gambling—display——"

"And beside," said another, "Manerville is a poor creature; he has no sense, as limp as wet-paper, allowing himself to be fleeced, and incapable of any decisive action. He was born to be ruined."

Paul shook his old friend's hand and took refuge on board. Mathias stood on the quay, looking at his old client, who leaned over the netting, defying the crowd with a look of scorn.

Just as the anchor was weighed, Paul saw that Mathias was signaling to him by waving his handkerchief. The old housekeeper had come in hot haste, and was standing by her master, who seemed greatly excited by some matter of importance. Paul persuaded the captain to wait a few minutes and send a boat to land, that he might know what the old lawyer wanted; he was signaling vigorously, evidently desiring him to disembark. Mathias, too infirm to go to the ship, gave two letters to one of the sailors who were in the boat.

"My good fellow," said the old notary, showing one of the letters to the sailor, "this letter, mark it well, make no mistake—this packet has just been delivered by a messenger who has ridden from Paris in thirty-five hours. Explain this clearly

to Monsieur le Comte, do not forget. It might make him change his plans."

"And we should have to land him?"

"Yes," said the lawyer rashly.

The sailor in most parts of the world is a creature apart, professing the deepest contempt for all landlubbers. As to townsfolk, he cannot understand them; he knows nothing about them; he laughs them to scorn; he cheats them if he can without direct dishonesty. This one, as it happened, was a man of Lower Brittany, who saw worthy old Mathias' instructions in only one light.

"Just so," he muttered, as he took his oar, "land him again! The captain is to lose a passenger! If we listened to these landlubbers, we should spend our lives in pulling them between the ship and shore. Is he afraid his son will take cold?"

So the sailor gave Paul the letters without any message. On recognizing his wife's writing and de Marsay's, Paul imagined all that either of them could have to say to him; and being determined not to risk being influenced by the offers that might be inspired by their regard, he put the letters in his pocket with apparent indifference.

"And that is the rubbish we are kept waiting for! What nonsense!" said the sailor to the captain, in his broad Breton. "If the matter were as important as that old guy declared, would Monsieur le Comte drop the papers into his scuppers?"

Paul, lost in the dismal reflections that come over the strongest man in such circumstances, gave himself up to melancholy, while he waved his hand to his old friend, and bade farewell to France, watching the fast-disappearing build-ings of Bordeaux.

He presently sat down on a coil of rope, and there night found him, lost in meditation. Doubt came upon him as twilight fell; he gazed anxiously into the future; he could see

nothing before him but perils and uncertainty, and wondered whether his courage might not fail him. He felt some vague alarm as he thought of Natalie left to herself; he repented of his decision, regretting Paris and his past life.

Then he fell a victim to sea-sickness. Every one knows the miseries of this condition, and one of the worst features of its sufferings is the total effacement of will that accompanies it. An inexplicable incapacity loosens all the bonds of vitality at the core; the mind refuses to act, and everything is a matter of total indifference—a mother can forget her child, a lover his mistress; the strongest man becomes a mere inert mass. Paul was carried to his berth, where he remained for three days, alternately violently ill, and plied with grog by the sailors, thinking of nothing or sleeping; then he went through a sort of convalescence and recovered his ordinary health.

On the morning when, finding himself better, he went for a walk on deck to breathe the sea-air of a more southern climate, on putting his hands in his pockets he felt his letters. He at once took them out to read them, and began by Natalie's. In order that the Comtesse de Manerville's letter may be fully understood, it is necessary first to give that written by Paul to his wife on leaving Paris.

PAUL DE MANERVILLE TO HIS WIFE.

“MY BEST BELOVED:—When you read this letter I shall be far from you, probably on the vessel that is to carry me to India, where I am going to repair my shattered fortune. I did not feel that I had the courage to tell you of my departure. I have deceived you; but was it not necessary? You would have pinched yourself to no purpose, you would have wished to sacrifice your own fortune. Dear Natalie, feel no remorse; I shall know no repentance. When I return with millions, I will imitate your father; I will lay them at your feet as he laid his at your mother's, and will say, ‘It is all yours.’

"I love you to distraction, Natalie; and I can say so without fearing that you will make my avowal a pretext for exerting a power which only weak men dread. Yours was unlimited from the first day I ever saw you. My love alone has led me to disaster; my gradual ruin has brought me the delirious joys of the gambler. As my money diminished my happiness grew greater; each fraction of my wealth converted into some little gratification to you caused me heavenly rapture. I could have wished you to have more caprices than you ever had.

"I knew that I was marching to an abyss, but I went, my brow wreathed with joys and feelings unknown to vulgar souls. I acted like the lovers who shut themselves up for a year or two in a cottage by a lake, vowing to kill themselves after plunging into the ocean of happiness, dying in all the glory of their illusions and their passion. I have always thought such persons eminently rational. You have never known anything of my pleasures or of my sacrifices. And is there not exquisite enjoyment in concealing from the one we love the cost of the things she wishes for?

"I may tell you these secrets now. I shall be far indeed away when you hold this sheet loaded with my love. Though I forego the pleasure of your gratitude, I do not feel that clutch at my heart which would seize me if I tried to talk of these things. Alas, my dearest, there is deep self-interest in thus revealing the past. Is it not to add to the volume of our love in the future? Could it indeed ever need such a stimulus? Do we not feel that pure affection to which proof is needless, which scorns time and distance, and lives in its own strength?

"Ah! Natalie, I just now left the table where I am writing by the fire, and looked at you asleep, calm and trustful, in the attitude of a guileless child, your hand lying where I could take it. I left a tear on the pillow that has been the witness of our happiness. I leave you without a fear on the promise of that attitude; I leave you to win peace by winning a fortune

so large that no anxiety may ever disturb our joys, and that you may satisfy your every wish. Neither you nor I could ever dispense with the luxuries of the life we lead. I am a man, and I have courage; mine alone be the task of amassing the fortune we require.

“You might perhaps think of following me! I will not tell you the name of the ship, nor the port I sail from, nor the day I leave. A friend will tell you when it is too late.

“Natalie, my devotion to you is boundless; I love you as a mother loves her child, as a lover worships his mistress, with perfect disinterestedness. The work be mine, the enjoyment yours; mine the sufferings, yours the life of happiness. Amuse yourself; keep up all your habits of luxury; go to the Italiens, to the French opera, into society and to balls; I absolve you beforehand. But, dear angel, each time you come home to the nest where we have enjoyed the fruits that have ripened during our five years of love, remember your lover, think of me for a moment, and sleep in my heart. That is all I ask.

“I—my one, dear, constant thought—when, under scorching skies, working for our future, I find some obstacle to overcome, or when, tired out, I rest in the hope of my return—I shall think of you who are the beauty of my life. Yes, I shall try to live in you, telling myself that you have neither cares nor uneasiness. Just as life is divided into day and night, waking and sleeping, so I shall have my life of enchantment in Paris, my life of labors in India—a dream of anguish, a reality of delight; I shall live so completely in what is real to you that my days will be the dream. I have my memories; canto by canto I shall recall the lovely poem of five years; I shall remember the days when you chose to be dazzling, when by some perfection of evening-dress or morning-wrapper you made yourself new in my eyes. I shall taste on my lips the flavor of our little feasts.

“Yes, dear angel, I am going like a man pledged to some high emprise when by success he is to win his mistress! To

me the past will be like the dreams of desire which anticipate realization, and which realization often disappoints. But you have always more than fulfilled them. And I shall return to find a new wife, for will not absence lend you fresh charms? Oh, my dear love, my Natalie, let me be a religion to you. Be always the child I have seen sleeping! If you were to betray my blind confidence—Natalie, you would not have to fear my anger, of that you may be sure; I should die without a word. But a woman does not deceive the husband who leaves her free, for women are never mean. She may cheat a tyrant; but she does not care for the easy treason which would deal a death-blow. No, I cannot imagine such a thing—forgive me for this cry, natural to a man.

“My dearest, you will see de Marsay; he is now the tenant holding our house, and he will leave you in it. This lease to him was necessary to avoid useless loss. My creditors, not understanding that payment is merely a question of time, might have seized the furniture and the amount of the rent of the house. Be good to de Marsay; I have the most perfect confidence in his abilities and in his honor. Make him your advocate and your adviser, your familiar. Whatever his engagements may be, he will always be at your service. I have instructed him to keep an eye on the liquidation of my debts; if he should advance a sum of which he presently needed the use, I trust to you to pay him. Remember I am not leaving you to de Marsay’s guidance, but to your own; when I mention him, I do not force him upon you.

“Alas, I cannot begin to write on business matters; only an hour remains to me under the same roof with you. I count your breathing; I try to picture your thoughts from the occasional changes in your sleep, your breathing revives the flowery hours of our early love. At every throb of your heart mine goes forth to you with all its wealth, and I scatter over you the petals of the roses of my soul, as children strew them in front of the altars on Corpus Christi Day. I commend

you to the memories I am pouring out on you ; I would, if I could, pour my life-blood into your veins that you might indeed be mine, that your heart might be my heart, your thoughts my thoughts, that I might be wholly in you ! And you utter a little murmur as if in reply !

“ Be ever as calm and lovely as you are at this moment. I would I had the fabled power of which we hear in fairy tales, and could leave you thus to sleep during my absence, to wake you on my return with a kiss. What energy, what love, must I feel to leave you when I behold you thus. You are Spanish and religious ; you will observe an oath taken even in your sleep when your unspoken word was believed in beyond a doubt.

“ Farewell, my dearest. Your hapless Sweet-pea is swept away by the storm-wind ; but it will come back to you for ever on the wings of Fortune. Nay, dear Ninie, I will not say farewell, for you will always be with me. Will you not be the soul of my actions ? Will not the hope of bringing you such happiness as cannot be wrecked give spirit to my enterprise and guide all my steps ? Will you not always be present to me ? No, it will not be the tropical sun, but the fire of your eyes, that will light me on my way.

“ Be as happy as a woman can be, bereft of her lover. I should have been glad to have a parting kiss, in which you were not merely passive ; but, my Ninie, my adored darling, I would not awaken you. When you awake you will find a tear on your brow ; let it be a talisman. Think, oh, think of him who is perhaps to die for you, far away from you ; think of him less as your husband than as a lover who worships you and leaves you in God’s keeping.”

REPLY FROM THE COMTESSE DE MANERVILLE TO
HER HUSBAND.

“ MY DEAREST :—What grief your letter has brought me ! Had you any right to form a decision which concerns us

equally without consulting me? Are you free? Do you not belong to me? And am I not half a creole? Why should I not follow you? You have shown me that I am no longer indispensable to you. What have I done, Paul, that you should rob me of my rights? What is to become of me alone in Paris? Poor dear, you assume the blame for any ill I may have done. But am I not partly to blame for this ruin? Has not my finery weighed heavily in the wrong scale? You are making me curse the happy, heedless life we have led these four years. To think of you as exiled for six years! Is it not enough to kill me? How can you make a fortune in six years? Will you ever come back? I was wiser than I knew when I so strenuously opposed the separate maintenance on which you and my mother so absolutely insisted. What did I tell you? That it would expose you to discredit, that it would ruin your credit! You had to be quite angry before I would give in.

“My dear Paul, you have never been so noble in my eyes as you are at this moment. Without a hint of despair, to set out to make a fortune! Only such a character, such energy as yours could take such a step. I kneel at your feet. A man who confesses to weakness in such perfect good faith, who restores his fortune from the same motive that has led him to waste it—for love, for an irresistible passion—oh, Paul, such a man is sublime! Go without fear, trample down every obstacle, and never doubt your Natalie, for it would be doubting yourself. My poor dear, you say you want to live in me? And shall not I always live in you? I shall not be here, but with you wherever you may be.

“Though your letter brought me cruel anguish, it filled me too with joy; in one minute I went through both extremes; for, seeing how much you love me, I was proud, too, to find that my love was appreciated. Sometimes I have fancied that I loved you more than you loved me; now I confess myself outdone; you may add that delightful superiority to the

others you possess ; but have I not many more reasons for loving ? Your letter, the precious letter in which your whole soul is revealed, and which so plainly tells me that between you and me nothing is lost, will dwell on my heart during your absence, for your whole soul is in it ; that letter is my glory !

“ I am going to live with my mother at Lanstrac ; I shall there be dead to the world, and shall save out of my income to pay off your debts. From this day forth, Paul, I am another woman ; I take leave for ever of the world ; I will not have a pleasure that you do not share.

“ Beside, Paul, I am obliged to leave Paris and live in solitude. Dear boy, you have a twofold reason for making a fortune. If your courage needed a spur, you may now find another heart dwelling in your own. My dear, cannot you guess ? We shall have a child. Your dearest hopes will be crowned, monsieur. I would not give you the deceptive joys which are heart-breaking ; we have already had so much disappointment on that score, and I was afraid of having to withdraw the glad announcement. But now I am sure of what I am saying, and happy to cast a gleam of joy over your sorrow. This morning, suspecting no evil, I had gone to the Church of the Assumption to return thanks to God. How could I foresee disaster ? Everything seemed to smile on me. As I came out of church, I met my mother ; she had heard of your distress, and had come by post with all her savings, thirty thousand francs, hoping to be able to arrange matters. What a heart, Paul ! I was quite happy ; I came home to tell you the two pieces of good news while we breakfasted under the awning in the conservatory, and I had ordered all the dainties you like best.

“ Augustine gave me your letter. A letter from you, when we had slept together ! It was a tragedy in itself. I was seized with a shivering fit—then I read it—I read it in tears, and my mother too melted into tears. And a woman must

love a man very much to cry over him, crying makes us so ugly. I was half-dead. So much love and so much courage ! So much happiness and such great grief ! To be unable to clasp you to my heart, my beloved, at the very moment when my admiration for your magnanimity most constrained me ! What woman could withstand such a whirlwind of emotions ? To think that you were far away when your hand on my heart would have comforted me ; that you were not there to give me the look I love so well, to rejoice with me over the realization of our hopes ; and I was not with you to soften your sorrow by the affection which made your loving Natalie so dear to you, and which can make you forget every annoyance, every grief !

“I wanted to be off to fly to your feet ; but my mother pointed out that the Belle-Amélie is to sail to-morrow, that only the post could go fast enough to overtake you, and that it would be the height of folly to risk all our future happiness on a jolt. Though a mother already, I ordered horses, and my mother cheated me into the belief that they would be brought round. She acted wisely, for I was already unfit to move. I could not bear such a combination of violent agitations, and I fainted away. I am writing in bed, for I am ordered perfect rest for some months. Hitherto I have been a frivolous woman, now I mean to be the mother of a family. Providence is good to me, for a child to nurse and bring up can alone alleviate the sorrows of your absence. In it I shall find a second Paul to make much of. I shall thus publicly flaunt the love we have so carefully kept to ourselves. I shall tell the truth.

“My mother has already had occasion to contradict certain calumnies which are current as to your conduct. The two Vandenesses, Charles and Félix, had defended you stoutly, but your friend de Marsay makes game of everything ; he laughs at your detractors instead of answering them. I do not like such levity in response to serious attacks. Are you

not mistaken in him? However, I will obey and make a friend of him.

"Be quite easy, my dearest, with regard to anything that may affect your honor. Is it not mine?

"I am about to pledge my diamonds. My mother and I will strain every resource to pay off your debts and try to buy in the vine-land of Bellerose. My mother, who is as good a man of business as a regular accountant, blames you for not having been open with her. She would not then have purchased—thinking to give you pleasure—the estate of Grain-rouge, which cut in on your lands; and then she could have lent you a hundred and thirty thousand francs. She is in despair at the step you have taken, and is afraid you will suffer from the life in India. She entreats you to be temperate, and not to be led astray by the women! I laughed in her face. I am as sure of you as of myself. You will come back to me wealthy and faithful. I alone in the world know your womanly refinement and those secret feelings which make you an exquisite human flower, worthy of heaven. The Bordeaux folk had every reason to give you your pretty nickname. And who will take care of my delicate flower? My heart is racked by dreadful ideas. I, his wife, his Natalie, am here, when already perhaps he is suffering! I, so entirely one with you, may not share your troubles, your annoyances, your dangers? In whom can you confide? How can you live without the ear into which you whisper everything? Dear, sensitive plant, swept away by the gale, why should you be transplanted from the only soil in which your fragrance could ever be developed? I feel as if I had been alone for two centuries, and I am cold in Paris! And I have cried so long——

"The cause of your ruin! What a text for the meditations of a woman full of love! You have treated me like a child, to whom nothing is refused that it asks for; like a courtesan, for whom a spendthrift throws away his fortune. Your delicacy, as you style it, is an insult. Do you suppose that I can-

not live without fine clothes, balls, operas, successes? Am I such a frivolous woman? Do you think me incapable of a serious thought, of contributing to your fortune as much as I ever contributed to your pleasures? If you were not so far away and ill at ease, you would here find a good scolding for your impertinence. Can you disparage your wife to such an extent? Bless me! What did I go out into society for? To flatter your vanity; it was for you I dressed, and you know it. If I had been wrong, I should be too cruelly punished; your absence is a bitter expiation for our domestic happiness. That happiness was too complete; it could not fail to be paid for by some great sorrow; and here it is! After such delights, so carefully screened from the eyes of the curious; after these constant festivities, varied only by the secret madness of our affection, there is no alternative but solitude. Solitude, my dear one, feeds great passions, and I long for it. What can I do in the world of fashion; to whom should I report my triumphs?

“Ah, to live at Lanstrac, on the estate laid out by your father, in the house you restored so luxuriously—to live there with your child, waiting for you, and sending forth to you night and morning the prayers of the mother and child, of the woman and the angel—will not that be half-happiness? Cannot you see the little hands folded in mine? Will you still remember, as I shall remember every evening, the happiness of which your dear letter reminds me? Oh, yes, for we love each other equally. I can no more doubt you than you could doubt me.

“What consolations can I offer you here, I, who am left desolate, crushed; I, who look forward to the next six years as a desert to be crossed? Well, I am not the most to be pitied, for will not that desert be cheered by our little one? Yes—a boy—I must give you a boy, must I not? So farewell, dearly beloved one, our thoughts and our love will ever follow you. The tears on my paper will tell you much that I

cannot express, and take the kisses you will find left here, below my name, by your own

“NATALIE.”

This letter threw Paul into a day-dream, caused no less by the rapture into which he was thrown by these expressions of love than by the reminiscences of happiness thus intentionally called up; and he went over them all, one by one, to account for this promise of a child.

The happier a man is, the greater are his fears. In souls that are exclusively tender—and a tender nature is generally a little weak—jealousy and disquietude are usually in direct proportion to happiness and to its greatness. Strong souls are neither jealous nor easily frightened: jealousy is doubt, and fear is small-minded. Belief without limits is the leading attribute of a high-minded man; if he is deceived—and strength as well as weakness may make him a dupe—his scorn serves him as a hatchet, and he cuts through everything. Such greatness is exceptional. Which of us has not known what it is to be deserted by the spirit that upholds this frail machine, and to hear only the unknown voice that denies everything?

Paul, caught as it were in the toils of certain undeniable facts, doubted and believed both at once. Lost in thought, a prey to terrible but involuntary questionings, and yet struggling with the proofs of true affection and his belief in Natalie, he read this discursive epistle through twice, unable to come to any conclusion for or against his wife. Love may be as great in wordiness as in brevity of expression.

Thoroughly to understand Paul's frame of mind, he must be seen floating on the ocean as on the wide expanse of the past; looking back on his life as on a cloudless sky, and coming back at last after whirlwinds of doubt to the pure, entire, and untarnished faith of a believer, of a Christian, of a lover convinced by the voice of his heart.

It is now not less necessary to give the letter to which Henri de Marsay's was a reply.

COMTE PAUL DE MANERVILLE TO MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS
HENRI DE MARSAY.

“HENRI:—I am going to tell you one of the greatest things a man can tell a friend: I am ruined. When you read this I shall be starting from Bordeaux for Calcutta on board the good ship *Belle-Amélie*. You will find in your notary's hands a deed which only needs your signature to ratify it, in which I let my house to you for six years on a hypothetical lease; you will write a letter counteracting it to my wife. I am obliged to take this precaution in order that Natalie may remain in her own house without any fear of being turned out of it. I also empower you to draw the income of the entailed property for four years, as against a sum of a hundred and fifty thousand francs that I will beg you to send by a bill, drawn on some house in Bordeaux, to the order of Mathias. My wife will give you her guarantee to enable you to draw the income. If the revenue from the entail should repay you sooner than I imagine, we can settle accounts on my return. The sum I ask of you is indispensable to enable me to set out to seek my fortune; and, if I am not mistaken in you, I shall receive it without delay at Bordeaux the day before I sail. I have acted exactly as you would have acted in my place. I have held out to the last moment without allowing any one to suspect my position. Then, when the news of the seizure of my saleable estates reached Paris, I had raised money by notes of hand to the sum of a hundred thousand francs, to try gambling. Some stroke of luck might reinstate me. I lost.

“How did I ruin myself? Voluntarily, my dear Henri. From the very first day I saw that I could not go on in the way I started. I knew what the consequence would be; I persisted in shutting my eyes, for I could not bear to say to my wife: ‘Let us leave Paris and go to live at Lanstrac.’ I

have ruined myself for her, as a man ruins himself for a mistress, but knowing it.

“Between you and me, I am neither a simpleton nor weak. A simpleton does not allow himself to be governed, with his eyes open, by an absorbing passion; and a man who sets out to reconstitute his fortune in the Indies, instead of blowing his brains out, is a man of spirit. And so, my dear friend, as I care for wealth only for her sake, as I do not wish to be any man’s dupe, and as I shall be absent six years, I place my wife in your keeping. You are enough the favorite of women to respect Natalie, and to give me the benefit of the honest friendship that binds us. I know of no better protector than you will be. I am leaving my wife childless; a lover would be a danger. You must know, my dear de Marsay, I love Natalie desperately, cringingly, and am not ashamed of it. I could, I believe, forgive her if she were unfaithful, not because I am certain that I could be revenged, if I were to die for it! but because I would kill myself to leave her happy if I myself could not make her happy.

“But what have I to fear? Natalie has for me that true regard, independent of love, which preserves love. I have treated her like a spoiled child. I found such perfect happiness in my sacrifices, one led so naturally to the other, that she would be a monster to betray me. Love deserves love.

“Alas! must I tell you the whole truth, my dear Henri? I have just written her a letter in which I have led her to believe that I am setting out full of hope, with a calm face; that I have not a doubt, no jealousy, no fears; such a letter as sons write to deceive a mother when they go forth to die. Good God! de Marsay, I had hell within me, I am the most miserable man on earth. You must hear my cries, my gnashings of the teeth. To you I confess the tears of a despairing lover. Sooner would I sweep the gutter under her window for six years, if it were possible, than return with millions after six years’ absence. I suffer the utmost anguish; I shall go on

from sorrow to sorrow till you shall have written me a line to say that you accept a charge which you alone in the world can fulfill and carry out.

“My dear de Marsay, I cannot live without that woman; she is air and sunshine to me. Take her under your ægis, keep her faithful to me—even against her will. Yes, I can still be happy with such half-happiness. Be her protector; I have no fear of you. Show her how vulgar it would be to deceive me; that it would make her like every other woman; that the really brilliant thing will be to remain faithful.

“She must still have money enough to carry on her easy and undisturbed life; but if she should want anything, if she should have a whim, be her banker—do not be afraid, I shall come home rich.

“After all, my alarms are vain, no doubt; Natalie is an angel of virtue. When Félix de Vandenesse fell desperately in love with her and allowed himself to pay her some attentions, I only had to point out the danger to Natalie, and she thanked me so affectionately that I was moved to tears. She said that it would be awkward for her reputation if a man suddenly disappeared from her house, but that she would find means to dismiss him; and she did, in fact, receive him very coldly, so that everything ended well. In four years we have never had any other subject of discussion, if a conversation as between friends can be called a discussion.

“Well, my dear Henri, I must say farewell like a man. The disaster has come. From whatever cause, there it is; I can but bow to it. Poverty and Natalie are two irreconcilable terms. And the balance of my debts and assets will be very nearly exact; no one will have anything of which to complain. Still, should some unforeseen circumstance threaten my honor, I trust in you.

“Finally, if any serious event should occur, you can write me under cover to the governor-general at Calcutta. I have friends in his household, and some one will take charge of any

letters for me that may arrive from Europe. My dear friend, I hope to find you still the same on my return—a man who can make fun of everything, and who is, nevertheless, alive to the feelings of others when they are in harmony with the noble nature you feel in yourself.

“You can stay in Paris! At the moment when you read this I shall be crying, ‘To Carthage!’”

THE MARQUIS HENRI DE MARSAY IN REPLY TO THE COMTE
PAUL DE MANERVILLE.

“And so, Monsieur le Comte, you have collapsed! Monsieur the Ambassador has turned turtle! Are these the fine things you were doing? Why, Paul, did you keep any secret from me? If you had said but one word, my dear old fellow, I could have thrown light on the matter.

“Your wife refuses her guarantee. That should be enough to unseal your eyes. And, if not, I would have you to know that your notes of hand have been protested at the suit of one Lécuyer, formerly head-clerk to one Solonet, a notary at Bordeaux. This sucking money-lender, having come from Gascony to try his hand at stock-jobbing, lends his name to screen your very honorable mother-in-law, the real creditor to whom you owe the hundred thousand francs, for which, it is said, she gave you seventy thousand. Compared to Madame Evangelista, Daddy Gobseck is soft flannel velvet, a soothing draught, a *meringue à la vanille* (a vanilla-cake), a fifth-act uncle. Your vineyard of Bellerose will be your wife’s booty; her mother is to pay her the difference between the price it sells for and the sum-total of her claims. Madame Evangelista is to acquire le Gaudet and le Grassol, and the mortgages on your house at Bordeaux are all in her hands under the names of men of straw, found for her by that fellow Solonet. And in this way these two worthy women will secure an income of a hundred and twenty thousand francs, the amount derivable from your estates, added to thirty-odd thousand

francs a year in the Funds which the dear, delightful hussies have secured.

"Your wife's guarantee was unnecessary. The aforementioned Lécuyer came this morning to offer me repayment of the money I have sent you in exchange for a formal transfer of my claims. The vintage of 1825, which your mother-in-law has safe in the cellars at Lanstrac, is enough to pay me off. So the two women have calculated that you would be at sea by this time; but I am writing by special messenger that this may reach you in time for you to follow the advice I proceed to give you.

"I made this Lécuyer talk; and from his lies, his statements, and his concealments, I have culled the clues that I needed to reconstruct the whole web of domestic conspiracy that has been working against you. This evening at the Spanish Embassy I shall pay my admiring compliments to your wife and her mother. I shall be most attentive to Madame Evangelista, I shall throw you over in the meanest way, I shall abuse you, but with extreme subtlety; anything strong would at once put this Mascarille in petticoats on the scent. What did you do that set her against you? That is what I mean to find out. If only you had had wit enough to make love to the mother before marrying the daughter, you would at this moment be a peer of France, Duc de Manerville, and ambassador to Madrid. If only you had sent for me at the time of your marriage! I could have taught you to know, to analyze, the two women you would have to fight, and by comparing our observations we should have hit on some good counsel. Was not I the only friend you had who would certainly honor your wife? Was I a man to be afraid of? But after these women had learned to judge me, they took fright and divided us. If you had not been so silly as to sulk with me, they could not have eaten you out of house and home.

"Your wife contributed largely to our coolness. She was talked over by her mother, to whom she wrote twice a week,

and you never heeded it. I recognized my friend Paul as I heard this detail.

“Within a month I will be on such terms with your mother-in-law that she herself will tell me the reason for the Hispano-Italian *vendetta* she has evidently vowed on you—you, the best fellow in the world. Did she hate you before her daughter was in love with Félix de Vandenesse? or has she driven you to the Indies that her daughter may be free, as a woman is in France when completely separated from her husband? That is the problem.

“I can see you leaping and howling when you read that your wife is madly in love with Félix de Vandenesse. If I had not taken it into my head to make a tour in the East with Montriveau, Ronquerolles, and certain other jolly fellows of your acquaintance, I could have told you more about this intrigue, which was incipient when I left. I could then see the first sprouting seed of your catastrophe. What gentleman could be scurvy enough to open such a subject without some invitation, or dare to blow on a woman? Who could bear to break the witch’s mirror in which a friend loves to contemplate the fairy scenes of a happy marriage? Are not such illusions the wealth of the heart? And was not your wife, my dear boy, in the widest sense of the word, a woman of the world? She thought of nothing but her success, her dress; she frequented the Bouffons, the opera, and balls; rose late, drove in the Bois, dined out or gave dinner-parties. Such a life seems to me to be to women what war is to men; the public sees only the victorious, and forgets the dead. Some delicate women die of this exhausting round; those who survive must have iron constitutions, and consequently very little heart and very strong stomachs. Herein lies the reason of the want of feeling, the cold atmosphere of drawing-room society. Nobler souls dwell in solitude; the tender and weak succumb. What are left are the boulders which keep the social ocean within bounds by enduring to be beaten and

rolled by the breakers without wearing out. Your wife was made to withstand this life; she seemed inured to it; she was always fresh and beautiful. To me the inference was obvious—she did not love you, while you loved her to distraction. To strike the spark of love in this flinty nature a man of iron was required.

“After being caught by Lady Dudley, who could not keep him (she is the wife of my real father), Félix was obviously the man for Natalie. Nor was there any great difficulty in guessing that your wife did not care for you. From indifference to aversion is but a step; and sooner or later, a discussion, a word, an act of authority on your part, a mere trifle, would make your wife overleap it.

“I myself could have rehearsed the scene that took place between you every night in her room. You have no child, my boy. Does not that fact account for many things to an observer? You, who were in love, could hardly discern the coldness natural to a young woman whom you have trained to the very point for Félix de Vandenesse. If you had discovered that your wife was cold-hearted, the stupid policy of married life would have prompted you to regard it as the reserve of innocence. Like all husbands, you fancied you could preserve her virtue in a world where women whisper to each other things that men dare not say, where all that a husband would never tell his wife is spoken and commented on behind a fan, with laughter and banter, *à propos* to a trial or an adventure. Though your wife liked the advantages of a married life, she found the price a little heavy; the price, the tax, was yourself!

“You, seeing none of these things, went on digging pits and covering them with flowers, to use the time-honored rhetorical figure. You calmly submitted to the rule which governs the common run of men, and from which I had wished to protect you.

“My dear boy, nothing was wanting to make you as great

an ass as any tradesman who is surprised when his wife deceives him; nothing but this outcry to me about your sacrifices and your love for Natalie: 'How ungrateful she would be to betray me; I have done this and that and the other, and I will do more yet, I will go to India for her sake——' etc., etc. My dear Paul, you have lived in Paris, and you have had the honor of the most intimate friendship of one Henri de Marsay, and you do not know the commonest things, the first principles of the working of the female mechanism, the alphabet of a woman's heart! You may slave yourself to death, you may go to Sainte-Pélagie, you may kill two-and-twenty men, give up seven mistresses, serve Laban, cross the desert, narrowly escape the hulks, cover yourself with disgrace; like Nelson, refuse to give battle because you must kiss Lady Hamilton's shoulder, or, like Bonaparte, fight old Wurmser, get yourself cut up on the bridge of Arcole, rave like Rolando, break a leg in splints to dance with a woman for five minutes! But, my dear boy, what has any of these things to do with her loving you? If love were taken as proven by such evidence, men would be too happy; a few such demonstrations at the moment when he wanted her would win the woman of his heart.

"Love, you stupid old Paul, is a belief like that in the immaculate conception of the Virgin. You have it, or you have it not. Of what avail are rivers of blood, or the mines of Potosi, or the greatest glory, to produce an involuntary and inexplicable feeling? Young men like you, who look for love to balance their outlay, seem to me base usurers. Our legal wives owe us children and virtue; but they do not owe love. Love is the consciousness of happiness given and received, and the certainty of giving and getting it; it is an ever-living attraction, constantly satisfied, and yet insatiable. On the day when Vandenesse stirred in your wife's heart the chord you had left untouched and virginal, your amorous flourishes, your outpourings of soul, and of money, ceased even to be

remembered. Your nights of happiness strewn with roses—fudge! Your devotion—an offering of remorse! Yourself—a victim to be slain on the altar! Your previous life—a blank! One impulse of love annihilated your treasures of passion, which were now but old iron. He, Félix, has had her beauty, her devotion—for no return perhaps; but, in love, belief is as good as reality.

“Your mother-in-law was naturally on the side of the lover against the husband; secretly or confessedly she shut her eyes—or she opened them; I do not know what she did, but she took her daughter’s part against you. For fifteen years I have observed society, and I never knew a mother who, under such circumstances, deserted her daughter. Such indulgence is hereditary, from woman to woman. And what man can blame them? Some lawyer, perhaps, responsible for the Civil Code, which saw only formulas where feelings were at stake. The extravagance into which you were dragged by the career of a fashionable wife, the tendencies of an easy nature, and your vanity too, perhaps, supplied her with the opportunity of getting rid of you by an ingenious scheme of ruin.

“From all this you will conclude, my good friend, that the charge you put upon me, and which I should have fulfilled all the more gloriously because it would have amused me, is, so to speak, null and void. The evil I was to have hindered is done—*consummatum est*. Forgive me for writing *à la de Marsay*, as you say, on matters which to you are so serious. Far be it from me to cut capers on a friend’s grave, as heirs do on that of an uncle. But you write to me that you mean henceforth to be a man, and I take you at your word; I treat you as a statesman, and not as a lover.

“Has not this mishap been to you like the brand on his shoulder that determines a convict on a systematic antagonism to society, and a revolt against it? You are hereby released from one care—marriage was your master, now it is your servant. Paul, I am your friend in the fullest meaning of the

word. If your brain had been bound in a circlet of brass, if you had earlier had the energy that has come to you too late, I could have proved my friendship by telling you things that would have enabled you to walk over human beings as on a carpet. But whenever we talked over the combinations to which I owed the faculty of amusing myself with a few friends in the heart of Parisian civilization, like a bull in a china shop; whenever I told you, under romantic disguises, some true adventure of my youth, you always regarded them as romances, and did not see their bearing. Hence, I could only think of you as a case of unrequited passion. Well, on my word of honor, in the existing circumstances, you have played the nobler part, and you have lost nothing, as you might imagine, in my opinion. Though I admire a great scoundrel, I esteem and like those who are taken in.

“*À propos* to the doctor who came to such a bad end, brought to the scaffold by his love for his mistress, I remember telling you the far more beautiful story of the unhappy lawyer who is still living on the hulks, I know not where, branded as a forger because he wanted to give his wife—again, an adored wife—thirty thousand francs a year, and the wife gave him up to justice in order to get rid of him and live with another gentleman. You cried shame, you and some others too who were supping with us. Well, my dear fellow, you are that lawyer—minus the hulks.

“Your friends do not spare you the discredit which, in our sphere of life, is equivalent to a sentence pronounced by the Bench. The Marquise de Listomère, the sister of the two Vandenesses, and all her following, in which little Rastignac is now enlisted—a young rascal who is coming to the front; Madame d’Aiglemont and all her set, among whom Charles de Vandenesse is regnant; the Lenoncourts, the Comtesse Féraud, Madame d’Espard, the Nucingens, the Spanish Embassy; in short, a whole section of the fashionable world, very cleverly prompted, heap mud upon your name. ‘You

are a dissipated wretch, a gambler, a debauchee, and have made away with your money in the stupidest way. Your wife—an angel of virtue!—after paying your debts several times, has just paid off a hundred thousand francs to redeem bills you had drawn, though her fortune is apart from yours. Happily, you have pronounced sentence on yourself by getting out of the way. If you had gone on so, you would have reduced her to beggary, and she would have been a martyr to conjugal devotion!’ When a man rises to power, he has as many virtues as will furnish an epitaph; if he falls into poverty, he has more vices than the prodigal son; you could never imagine how many Don Juan vices are attributed to you now. You gambled on the Bourse, you had licentious tastes, which it cost you vast sums to indulge, and which are mentioned with comments and jests that mystify the women. You paid enormous interest to the money-lenders. The two Vandenesses laugh as they tell a story of Gigonnet’s selling you an ivory man-of-war for six thousand francs, and buying it of your manservant for five crowns only to sell it to you again, till you solemnly smashed it on discovering that you might have a real ship for the money it was costing you. The adventure occurred nine years ago, and Maxime de Trailles was the hero of it; but it is thought to fit you so well, that Maxime has lost the command of his frigate for good. In short, I cannot tell you everything, for you have furnished forth a perfect encyclopædia of tittle-tattle, to which every woman tries to add. In this state of affairs, the most prudish are ready to legitimize any consolation bestowed by *Comte Félix de Vandenesse*—for their father is dead at last, yesterday.

“Your wife is the great success of the hour. Yesterday Madame de Camps was repeating all these stories to me at the Italian opera. ‘Don’t talk to me,’ said I, ‘you none of you know half the facts. Paul had robbed the Bank and swindled the Treasury. He murdered Ezzelino, and caused the death of three Medoras of the Rue Saint-Denis, and, be-

tween you and me, I believe him to be implicated in the doings of the Ten Thousand. His agent is the notorious Jacques Collin, whom the police have never been able to find since his last escape from the hulks; Paul harbored him in his house. As you see, he is capable of any crime; he is deceiving the Government. Now they have gone off together to see what they can do in India, and rob the Great Mogul.' Madame de Camps understood that a woman of such distinction as herself ought not to use her pretty lips as a Venetian lion's paw.

"Many persons, on hearing these tragi-comedies, refuse to believe them; they defend human nature and noble sentiments, and insist that these are fictions. My dear fellow, Talleyrand made this clever remark: 'Everything happens.' Certainly even stranger things than this domestic conspiracy happen under our eyes; but the world is so deeply interested in denying them, and in declaring that it is slandered, and beside, these great dramas are played so naturally, with a veneer of such perfect good taste, that I often have to wipe my eyeglass before I can see to the bottom of things. But I say once more, when a man is my friend with whom I have received the baptism of Champagne, and communion at the altar of Venus Comoda, when we have together been confirmed by the clawing fingers of the croupier, and when then my friend is in a false position, I would uproot twenty families to set him straight again.

"You must see that I have a real affection for you; have I ever to your knowledge written so long a letter as this is? So read with care all that follows.

"Alack! Paul; I must take to writing, I must get into the habit of jotting down the minutes for dispatches; I am starting on a political career. Within five years I mean to have a minister's portfolio, or find myself an ambassador where I can stir public affairs round in my own way. There is an age when a man's fairest mistress is his country. I am joining

the ranks of those who mean to overthrow not merely the existing Ministry, but their whole system. In fact, I am swimming in the wake of a prince who halts only on one foot, and whom I regard as a man of political genius, whose name is growing great in history; as complete a prince as a great artist may be. We are Ronquerolles, Montriveau, the Grandlieus, the Roche-Hugons, Sérizy, Féraud, and Granville,* all united against the priestly party, as the silly party that is represented by the 'Constitutionnel' ingeniously calls it. We mean to upset the two Vandenesses, the Ducs de Lenoncourt, de Navarreins, de Langeais, and de la Grande-Aumônerie. To gain our end, we may go so far as to form a coalition with Lafayette, the Orleanists, the Left—all men who must be got rid of as soon as we have won the day, for to govern on their principles is impossible; and we are capable of anything for the good of the country—and our own.

"Personal questions as to the King's person are mere sentimental folly in these days; they must be cleared away. From that point of view, the English, with their sort of Doge, are more advanced than we are. Politics have nothing to do with that, my dear fellow. Politics consist in giving the nation an impetus by creating an oligarchy embodying a fixed theory of government, and able to direct public affairs along a straight path, instead of allowing the country to be pulled in a thousand different directions, which is what has been happening for the last forty years in our beautiful France—at once so intelligent and so sottish, so wise and so foolish; it needs a system indeed, much more than men. What are individuals in this great question? If the end is a great one, if the country may live happy and free from trouble, what do the masses care for the profits of our stewardship, our fortune, privileges, and pleasures?

"I am now standing firm on my feet. I have at the present moment a hundred and fifty thousand francs a year in the

* See "The Thirteen."

Three per Cents., and a reserve of two hundred thousand francs to repair damages. Even this does not seem to me very much ballast in the pocket of a man starting left foot foremost to scale the heights of power.

“A fortunate accident settled the question of my setting out on this career, which did not particularly smile on me, for you know my predilection for the life of the East. After thirty-five years of slumber, my highly respected mother woke up to the recollection that she had a son who might do her honor. Often when a vine-stock is eradicated, some years after shoots come up to the surface of the ground; well, my dear boy, my mother had almost torn me up by the roots from her heart, and I sprouted again in her head. At the age of fifty-eight, she thinks herself old enough to think no more of any men but her son. At this juncture she has met in some hot-water caldron, at I know not what baths, a delightful old maid—English, with two hundred and forty thousand francs a year; and, like a good mother, she has inspired her with an audacious ambition to become my wife. A maid of six-and-thirty, my word! Brought up in the strictest puritanical principles, a steady sitting hen, who maintains that unfaithful wives should be publicly burnt. ‘Where will you find wood enough?’ I asked her. I could have sent her to the devil, for two hundred and forty thousand francs a year are no equivalent for liberty, nor a fair price for my physical and moral worth and my prospects. But she is the sole heiress of a gouty old fellow, some London brewer, who within a calculable time will leave her a fortune equal at least to what the sweet creature has already. Added to these advantages, she has a red nose, the eyes of a dead goat, a waist that makes one fear lest she should break into three pieces if she falls down, and the coloring of a badly painted doll. But—she is delightfully economical; but—she will adore her husband, do what he will; but—she has the English gift: she will manage my house, my stables, my servants, my estates better

than any steward. She has all the dignity of virtue; she holds herself as erect as a confidante on the stage of the Français; nothing will persuade me that she has not been impaled and the shaft broken off in her body. Miss Stevens is, however, fair enough to be not too displeasing if I must positively marry her. But—and this to me is truly pathetic—she has the hands of a woman as immaculate as the sacred ark; they are so red that I have not yet hit on any way to whiten them that will not be too costly, and I have no idea how to fine down her fingers, which are like sausages. Yes; she evidently belongs to the brewhouse by her hands, and to the aristocracy by her money; but she is apt to affect the great lady a little too much, as do rich Englishwomen who want to be mistaken for them, and she displays her lobster-claws too freely.

“She has, however, as little intelligence as I could wish in a woman. If there were a stupider one to be found, I would set out to seek her. This girl, whose name is Dinah, will never criticise me; she will never contradict me; I shall be her Upper Chamber, her Lords and Commons. In short, Paul, she is indefeasible evidence of the English genius; she is a product of English mechanics brought to their highest pitch of perfection; she was undoubtedly made at Manchester, between the manufactory of Perry’s pens and the workshops for steam-engines. It eats, it drinks, it walks, it may have children, take good care of them, and bring them up admirably, and it apes a woman so well that you would believe it real.

“When my mother introduced us, she had set up the machine so cleverly, had so carefully fitted the pegs, and oiled the wheels so thoroughly, that nothing jarred; then, when she saw I did not make a very wry face, she set the springs in motion, and the woman spoke. Finally, my mother uttered the decisive words: ‘Miss Dinah Stevens spends no more than thirty thousand francs a year, and has been traveling for seven

years in order to economize.' So there is another image, and that one is silver.

"Matters are so far advanced that the banns are to be published. We have got as far as 'My dear love.' Miss makes eyes at me that might floor a porter. The settlements are prepared. My fortune is not inquired into; Miss Stevens devotes a portion of hers to creating an entail in landed estate, bearing an income of two hundred and forty thousand francs, and to the purchase of a house, likewise entailed. The settlement credited to me is of a million francs. She has nothing to complain of. I leave her uncle's money untouched.

"The worthy brewer, who has helped to found the entail, was near to bursting with joy when he heard that his niece was to be a marquise. He would be capable of doing something handsome for my eldest boy.

"I shall sell out of the Funds as soon as they are up to eighty, and invest in land. Thus, in two years I may look to get six hundred thousand francs a year out of real estate. So, you see, Paul, I do not give my friends advice that I am not ready to act upon.

"If you had but listened to me, you would have an English wife, some nabob's daughter, who would leave you the freedom of a bachelor and the independence necessary for playing the whist of ambition. I would concede my future wife to you if you were not married already. But that cannot be helped, and I am not the man to bid you chew the cud of the past.

"All this preamble was needful to explain to you that for the future my position in life will be such as a man needs if he wants to play the great game of pitch-and-toss. I cannot do without you, my friend. Instead of going to pickle in the Indies, you will find it much simpler to swim in my convoy in the waters of the Seine. Believe me, Paris is still the spot where fortune crops up most freely. Potosi is situated in the Rue Vivienne or the Rue de la Paix, the Place Vendôme, or

the Rue de la Rivoli. In every other country, manual labor, the sweat of the perspiring agent, marches and counter-marches, are indispensable to the accumulation of a fortune ; here intelligence is sufficient. Here a man, even of modern talent, may discover a gold-mine as he puts on his slippers or picks his teeth after dinner, as he goes to bed or gets up in the morning. Find me a spot on earth where a good commonplace idea brings in more money or is more immediately understood than it is here? If I climb to the top of the tree, am I the man to refuse you a hand, a word, a signature? Do not we young scamps need a friend we can rely on, if it were only to compromise him in our place and stead, to send him forth to die as a private, so as to save the general? Politics are impossible without a man of honor at hand, to whom everything may be said and done.

“ This, then, is my advice to you. Let the Belle-Amélie sail without you ; return here like a lightning flash, and I will arrange a duel for you with Félix de Vandenesse, in which you must fire first, and down with your man as dead as a pigeon. In France an outraged husband who kills his man is at once respectable and respected. No one ever makes game of him ! Fear, my dear boy, is an element of social life, and a means of success for those whose eyes never fall before the gaze of any other man. I, who care no more for life than for a cup of ass’ milk, and who never felt a qualm of fear, have observed the strange effects of that form of emotion on modern manners. Some dread the idea of losing the enjoyments to which they are fettered, others that of parting from some woman. The adventurous temper of past times, when a man threw away his life like a slipper, has ceased to exist. In many men courage is merely a clever speculation on the fear that may seize their adversary. None but the Poles now, in Europe, ever fight for the pleasure of it ; they still cultivate the art for art’s sake, and not as a matter of calculation. Kill Vandenesse, and your wife will tremble, your mother-in-law will tremble, the

public will tremble ; you will be rehabilitated, you will proclaim your frantic passion for your wife, every one will believe you, and you will be a hero. Such is France.

“ I shall not stickle over a hundred thousand francs with you. You can pay your principal debts, and can prevent utter ruin by pledging your property on a time bargain with option of repurchase, for you will soon be in position that will allow you to pay off the mortgage before the time is up. Also, knowing your wife’s character, you can henceforth rule her with a word. While you loved her you could not hold your own ; now, having ceased to love her, your power will be irresistible. I shall have made your mother-in-law as supple as a glove ; for what you have to do is to reinstate yourself with the hundred and fifty thousand francs those women have saved for themselves.

“ So give up your self-exile, which always seems to me the charcoal-brasier of men of brains. If you run away, you leave slander mistress of the field. The gambler who goes home to fetch his money and comes back to the tables loses all. You must have your funds in your pocket. You appear to me to be seeking fresh reinforcements in the Indies. No good at all ! We are two gamblers at the green table of politics ; between you and me loans are a matter of course. So take post-horses, come to Paris, and begin a new game ; with Henri de Marsay for a partner you will win, for Henri de Marsay knows what he wants and when to strike.

“ This, you see, is where we stand. My real father is in the English Ministry. We shall have connections with Spain through the Evangelistas ; for as soon as your mother-in-law and I have measured claws, we shall perceive that when devil meets devil there is nothing to be gained on either side. Montriveau is a lieutenant-general ; he will certainly be war minister sooner or later, for his eloquence gives him much power in the Chamber. Ronquerolles is in the Ministry and on the Privy Council. Martial de la Roche-Hugon is ap-

pointed minister to Germany and made a peer of France, and he has brought us as an addition Marshal the Duc de Carigliano and all the 'rump' of the Empire, which so stupidly held on to the rear of the Restoration. Sérizy is leader of the State Council; he is indispensable there. Granville is master of the legal party; he has two sons on the Bench. The Grandlieus are in high favor at Court. Féraud is the soul of the Gondreville set, low intriguers who, I know not why, are always at the top. Thus supported, what have we to fear? We have a foot in every capital, an eye in every cabinet; we hem in the whole administration without their suspecting it.

"Is not the money question a mere trifle, nothing at all, when all this machinery is ready. And, above all, what is a woman? Will you never be anything but a schoolboy? What is life, my dear fellow, when it is wrapped up in a woman? A ship over which we have no command, which obeys a wild compass though it has indeed a lode-stone; which runs before every wind that blows, and in which the man really is a galley-slave, obedient not only to the law, but to every rule improvised by his driver, without the possibility of retaliation. Phaugh!

"I can understand that from passion, or the pleasure to be found in placing our power in a pair of white hands, a man should obey his wife—but when it comes to obeying Médor—then away with Angelica! The great secret of social alchemy, my dear sir, is to get the best of everything out of each stage of our life, to gather all its leaves in spring, all its flowers in summer, all its fruits in autumn. Now we—I and some boon companions—have enjoyed ourselves for twelve years, like musketeers, black, white, and red, refusing ourselves nothing, not even a filibustering expedition now and again; henceforth we mean to shake ripe plums off the tree, at an age when experience has ripened the harvest. Come, join us; you shall have a share of the pudding we mean to stir.

"Come, and you will find a friend wholly yours in the skin of
HENRI DE M."

At the moment when Paul de Manerville finished reading this letter, of which every sentence fell like a sledge-hammer on the tower of his hopes, his illusions, and his love, he was already beyond the Azores. In the midst of this ruin, rage surged up in him—cold and impotent rage.

"What had I done to them?" he asked himself.

This question is the impulse of the simpleton, of the weak natures, which, as they see nothing, can foresee nothing.

"Henri, Henri!" he cried aloud. "The one true friend!"

Many men would have gone mad. Paul went to bed and slept the deep sleep which supervenes on immeasurable disaster; as Napoleon slept after the battle of Waterloo.

PARIS, *September–October, 1835.*



THE THIRTEEN
MAÎTRE CORNELIUS
GAMBARA

PREFACE.

IN its original form the "Histoire des Treize" consists—or, rather, it was originally built up—of three stories: "Féragus" or the "Rue Soly," "La Duchesse de Langeais" or "Ne touchez-pas à la hache," and "La Fille aux Yeux d'Or." The last, in some respects one of Balzac's most brilliant effects, does not appear here, as it contains things that are inconvenient. It may be noted that he had at one time the audacity to think of calling it "La Femme aux Yeux Rouges."

To tell the truth, there is more power than taste throughout the "Histoire des Treize," and perhaps not very much less unreality than power. Balzac is very much better than Eugène Sue, though Eugène Sue also is better than it is the fashion to think him just now. But he is here, to a certain extent, competing with Sue on the latter's own ground. The notion of the "Dévorants"—of a secret society of men devoted to each other's interests, entirely free from any moral or legal scruple, possessed of considerable means in wealth, ability, and position, all working together, by fair means or foul, for good ends or bad—is, no doubt, rather seducing to the imagination at all times; and it so happened that it was particularly seducing to the imagination of that time. And its example has been powerful since; it gave us Mr. Stevenson's "New Arabian Nights" only, as it were, the other day.

But there is something a little schoolboyish in it; and I do not know that Balzac has succeeded entirely in eliminating this something. The pathos of the death, under persecution, of the innocent Clémence does not entirely make up for the unreasonableness of the whole situation. Nobody can say that the abominable misconduct of Maulincour—who is a hopeless "cad"—is too much punished, though an English-

man may think that Dr. Johnson's receipt of three or four footmen with cudgels, applied repeatedly and unsparingly, would have been better than elaborately prepared accidents and duels, which were too honorable for a Peeping Tom of this kind; and poisonings, which reduced the avengers to the level of their victim. But the imbroglio is of itself stupid; these fathers who cannot be made known to husbands are mere stage properties, and should never be fetched out of the theatrical lumber-room by literature.

"La Duchesse de Langeais" is, I think, a better story, with more romantic attraction, free from the objections just made to "Ferragus," and furnished with a powerful, if slightly theatrical catastrophe. It is as good as anything that its author has done of the kind, subject to those general considerations of probability and otherwise which have been already hinted at. For those who are not troubled by any such critical reflections, both, no doubt, will be highly satisfactory. And, indeed, I must confess that I should not think much of any boy who, beginning Balzac with the "*Histoire des Treize*," failed to go rather mad over it. I know there was a time when I used to like it best of all, and thought not merely "*Eugénie Grandet*," but "*Le Père Goriot*" (though not the "*Peau de Chagrin*"), dull in comparison. Some attention, however, must be paid to two remarkable characters, on whom it is quite clear that Balzac expended a great deal of pains, and one of whom he seems to have "caressed," as the French say, with a curious admixture of dislike and admiration.

The first, Bourignard or Ferragus, is, of course, another, though a somewhat minor example—Collin or Vautrin being the chief—of that strange tendency to take intense interest in criminals, which seems to be a pretty constant eccentricity of many human minds, and which laid an extraordinary grasp on the great French writers of Balzac's time. I must confess, though it may sink me very low in some eyes, that I have never been able fully to appreciate the attractions

of crime and criminals, fictitious or real. Certain pleasant and profitable things, no doubt, retain their pleasure and their profit, to some extent, when they are done in the manner which is technically called criminal; but they seem to me to acquire no additional interest by being so. As the criminal of fact is, in the vast majority of cases, an exceedingly commonplace and dull person, the criminal of fiction seems to me only, or usually, to escape these curses by being absolutely improbable and unreal. But I know this is a terrible heresy.

Henri de Marsay is a much more ambitious and a much more interesting figure. In him are combined the attractions of criminality, beauty, brains, success, and, last of all, dandyism. It is a well-known and delightful fact that the most Anglophobe Frenchman—and Balzac might fairly be classed amongst them—have always regarded the English dandy with half-jealous, half-awful admiration. Indeed, our novelist, it will be seen, found it necessary to give Marsay English blood. But there is a tradition that this young Don Juan—not such a good fellow as Byron's, nor such a *grand seigneur* as Molière's—was partly intended to represent Charles de Rémusat, who is best known to this generation by very sober and serious philosophical works, and by his part in his mother's correspondence. I do not know that there ever were any imputations on M. de Rémusat's morals; but in memoirs of the time he is, I think, accused of a certain selfishness and *hauteur*, and he certainly made his way, partly by journalism, partly by society, to power very much as Marsay did. But Marsay would certainly not have written "Abelard" and the rest, or have returned to Ministerial rank in our time. Marsay, in fact, more fortunate than Rubempré, and of a higher stamp and flight than Rastignac, makes with them Balzac's trinity of sketches of the kind of personage whose part, in his day and since, every young Frenchman has aspired to play, and some have played. It cannot be said that "a moral man is Marsay;" it cannot be said that he has the element of good-nature which

redeems Rastignac. But he bears a blame and a burden for which we Britons are responsible in part—the Byronic ideal of the guilty hero coming to cross and blacken the old French model of unscrupulous good humor. It is not a very pretty mixture or a very worthy ideal ; but I am not so sure that it is not still a pretty common one.

The association of the three stories forming the “ *Histoire des Treize* ” is, in book form, original, inasmuch as they filled three out of the four volumes of “ *Études des Mœurs* ” published in 1834–35, and themselves forming part of the first collection of *Scènes de la Vie Parisienne*. But “ *Ferragus* ” had appeared in parts (with titles to each) in the “ *Revue de Paris* ” for March and April 1833, and part of “ *La Duchesse de Langeais* ” in the “ *Echo de la Jeune France* ” almost contemporaneously. There were divisions in this also. “ *Ferragus* ” and “ *La Duchesse* ” also appeared without “ *La Fille aux Yeux d’Or* ” in 1839, published in one volume by Charpentier, before their absorption at the usual time in the *Comédie*.

G. S.



THE THIRTEEN.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

IN the Paris of the Empire there were banded together Thirteen men equally impressed with the same thought, equally endowed with energy enough to keep them true to it, while among themselves they were loyal to keep faith even when their interests chanced to clash. They were sufficiently strong to set themselves above all laws; bold enough to shrink from no enterprise; and so fortunate as to succeed in nearly everything that they undertook. So profoundly politic were they that they could dissemble the tie which bound them together. They ran the greatest risks and kept their failures to themselves. Fear never entered into their calculations; not one of them had trembled before princes, before the executioner's axe, before innocence. They had taken each other as they were, regardless of social prejudices. Criminals they doubtless were, yet none the less were they all remarkable for some one of the virtues which go to the making of great men, and their numbers were filled up only from among picked recruits. Finally, that nothing should be lacking to complete the dark, mysterious romance of their history, nobody to this day knows whom they were. The Thirteen once realized all the wildest ideas conjured up by tales of the occult powers of a Manfred, a Faust, or a Melmoth; and to-day the band is broken up or, at any rate, dispersed. Its members have quietly returned beneath the yoke of the civil law; much as Morgan, the Achilles of piracy, gave up buccaneering to be a peaceable planter; and, untroubled by qualms of conscience, sat himself down by the fireside to dispose of blood-stained booty acquired by the red light of blazing towns and slaughter.

After Napoleon's death, the band was dissolved by a chance event which the author is bound for the present to pass over in silence, and its mysterious existence, as curious, it may be, as the darkest novel by Mrs. Radcliffe, came to an end.

It was only lately that the present writer, detesting, as he fancied, a faint desire for celebrity in one of the anonymous heroes to whom the whole band once owed an occult allegiance, received the somewhat singular permission to make public certain of the adventures which befell that band, provided that, while telling the story in his own fashion, he observed certain limits.

The aforesaid leader was still an apparently young man with fair hair and blue eyes, and a soft, thin voice which might seem to indicate a feminine temperament. His face was pale, his ways mysterious. He chatted pleasantly, and told me that he was only just turned of forty. He might have belonged to the very upper class. The name which he gave was probably assumed, and no one answering to his description was known in society. Who is he, do you ask? No one knows.

Perhaps when he made his extraordinary disclosures to the present writer, he wished to see them in some sort reproduced; to enjoy the effect of the sensation on the multitude; to feel as Macpherson might have felt when the name of Ossian, his creation, passed into all languages. And, in truth, that Scottish advocate knew one of the keenest, or, at any rate, one of the rarest sensations in human experience. What was this but the incognito of genius? To write an "Itinerary from Paris to Jerusalem" is to take one's share in the glory of a century, but to give a Homer to one's country—this surely is a usurpation of the rights of God.

The writer is too well acquainted with the laws of narration to be unaware of the nature of the pledge given by this brief preface; but, at the same time, he knows enough of the history of the Thirteen to feel confident that he will not disap

point any expectations raised by the programme. Tragedies dripping with gore, comedies piled up with horrors, tales of heads taken off in secret have been confided to him. If any reader has not had enough of the ghastly tales served up to the public for some time past, he has only to express his wish; the author is in a position to reveal cold-blooded atrocities and family secrets of a gloomy and astonishing nature. But in preference he has chosen those pleasanter stories in which stormy passions are succeeded by purer scenes, where the beauty and goodness of woman shine out the brighter for the darkness. And, to the honor of the Thirteen, such episodes as these are not wanting. Some day, perhaps, it may be thought worth while to give their whole history to the world; in which case it might form a pendant to the history of the buccaneers—that race apart so curiously energetic, so attractive in spite of their crimes.

When a writer has a true story to tell, he should scorn to turn it into a sort of puzzle-toy, after the manner of those novelists who take their reader for a walk through one cavern after another to show him a dried-up corpse at the end of the fourth volume, and inform him, by way of conclusion, that he has been frightened all along by a door hidden somewhere or other behind some tapestry; or a dead body, left by inadvertence, under the floor. So the present chronicler, in spite of his objection to prefaces, felt bound to introduce his fragment by a few remarks.

FERRAGUS, the first episode, is connected by invisible links with the history of the Thirteen, for the power which they acquired in a natural manner provides the apparently supernatural machinery.

Again, although a certain literary coquetry may be permissible to retailers of the marvelous, the sober chronicler is bound to forego such advantage as he may reap from an odd-sounding name, on which many ephemeral successes are founded in these days. Wherefore the present writer gives

the following succinct statement of the reasons which induced him to adopt the unlikely sounding title and sub-title.

In accordance with old-established custom, FERRAGUS is a name taken by the head of a guild of Dévorants, or journeymen. Every chief on the day of his election chooses a pseudonym and continues a dynasty of Dévorants precisely as a pope changes his name on his accession to the triple tiara; and as the church has its Clement XIV., Gregory XII., Julius II., or Alexander VI., so the workmen have their "Trempe-la-Soupe IX., Ferragus XXII., Tutanus XIII., or Masche-Fer IV." Who are the Dévorants, do you ask?

The Dévorants are one among many tribes of companions whose origin can be traced to a great mystical association formed among the workmen of Christendom for the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem. Companionism, to coin a word, is still a popular institution in France. Its traditions still exert a power over little-enlightened minds, over men so uneducated that they have not learned to break their oaths; and the various organizations might be turned to formidable account even yet if any rough-hewn man of genius arose to make use of them, for his instruments would be, for the most part, almost blind.

Wherever journeymen travel, they find a hostel for companions which has been in existence in the town from time immemorial. The *obade*, as they call it, is a kind of lodge with a "mother" in charge, an old, half-gypsy wife who has nothing to lose. She hears all that goes on in the countryside; and, either from fear or from long habit, is devoted to the interests of the tribe boarded and lodged by her. And as a result, this shifting population, subject as it is to an unalterable law of custom, has eyes in every place, and will carry out an order anywhere without asking questions; for the oldest journeyman is still at an age when a man has some beliefs left. What is more, the whole fraternity professes doctrines which, if unfolded never so little, are both true enough and mysterious

enough to electrify all the adepts with patriotism ; and the brothers of the league are so attached to their rules that there have been bloody battles between different fraternities on a question of principle. Fortunately, however, for peace and public order, if a Dévorant is ambitious, he takes to building houses, makes a fortune, and leaves the guild.

A great many curious things might be told of their rivals, the *Compagnons du Devoir* (of the duty), of all the different sects of workmen, their manners and customs and brotherhoods, and of the resemblances between them and the Freemasons ; but here, these particulars would be out of place. The author will merely add, that before the Revolution a Trempe-la-Soupe had been known in the King's service, which is to say, that he had the tenure of a place in his majesty's galleys for one hundred and one years ; but even thence he ruled his guild, and was religiously consulted on all matters, and if he escaped from the hulks he met with help, succor, and respect wherever he went. To have a chief in the hulks is one of those misfortunes for which Providence is responsible ; but a faithful lodge of Dévorants is bound, as before, to obey a power created by and set above themselves. Their lawful sovereign is in exile for the time being, but none the less is he their king. And now any romantic mystery hanging about the names Ferragus and the Dévorants is completely dispelled.

As for the Thirteen, the author feels that, on the strength of the details of this almost fantastic story, he can afford to give away yet another prerogative, though it is one of the greatest on record, and would possibly fetch a high price if brought into a literary auction mart ; for the owner might inflict as many volumes on the public as *La Contemporaine*.*

The Thirteen were all of them men tempered like Byron's friend Trelawney, the original (so it is said) of "The Corsair." All of them were fatalists, men of spirit and poetic temperament ; all of them were tired of the commonplace life

* A long series of so-called Memoirs, which appeared about 1830.

which they led ; all felt attracted toward Asiatic pleasures by all the vehement strength of newly awakened and long dormant forces. One of these, chancing to take up " Venice Preserved " for the second time, admired the sublime friendship between Pier and Jaffier, and fell to musing on the virtues of outlaws, the loyalty of the hulks, the honor of thieves, and the immense power that a few men can wield if they bring their whole minds to bear upon the carrying out of a single will. It struck him that the individual man rose higher than men. Then he began to think that if a few picked men should band themselves together ; and if, to natural wit, and education, and money, they could join a fanaticism hot enough to fuse, as it were, all these separate forces into a single one, then the whole world would be at their feet. From that time forth, with a tremendous power of concentration, they could wield an occult power against which the organization of society would be helpless ; a power which would push obstacles aside and defeat the will of others ; and the diabolical power of all would be at the service of each. A hostile world apart within the world, admitting none of the ideas, recognizing none of the laws of the world ; submitting only to the sense of necessity, obedient only from devotion ; acting all as one man in the interests of the comrade who should claim the aid of the rest ; a band of buccaneers with carriages and yellow kid gloves ; a close confederacy of men of extraordinary power, of amused and cool spectators of an artificial and pretty world which they cursed with smiling lips ; conscious as they were that they could make all things bend to their caprice, weave ingenious schemes of revenge, and live with one life in thirteen hearts, to say nothing of the unflinching pleasure of facing the world of men with a hidden misanthropy, a sense that they were armed against their kind, and could retire into themselves with one idea which the most remarkable men had not—all this constituted a religion of pleasure and egoism which made fanatics of the Thirteen.

The history of the Society of Jesus was repeated for the devil's benefit. It was hideous and sublime.

The pact was made; and it lasted, precisely because it seemed impossible. And so it came to pass that in Paris there was a fraternity of thirteen men, each one bound, body and soul, to the rest, and all of them strangers to each other in the sight of the world. But evening found them gathered together like conspirators, and then they had no thoughts apart; riches, like the wealth of the Old Man of the Mountain, they possessed in common; they had their feet in every salon, their hands in every strong box, their elbows in the streets, their heads upon all pillows, they did not scruple to help themselves at their pleasure. No chief commanded them, nobody was strong enough. The liveliest passion, the most urgent need took precedence—that was all. They were thirteen unknown kings; unknown, but with all the power and more than the power of kings; for they were both judges and executioners, they had taken wings that they might traverse the heights and depths of society, scorning to take any place in it, since all was theirs. If the author learns the reason of their abdication of this power he will communicate it.

And now the author is free to give those episodes in the History of the Thirteen which, by reason of the Parisian flavor of the details or the strangeness of the contrasts, possessed a peculiar attraction for him.

PARIS, 1831.

THE THIRTEEN.

I.

FERRAGUS,

CHIEF OF THE DÉVORANTS.

To Hector Berlioz.

THERE are streets in Paris which have lost their character as hopelessly as a man guilty of some shameful action ; there are likewise noble streets, streets that are simply honest and nothing more, young streets as to whose morality the public has as yet formed no opinion, and streets older than the oldest dowager. Then there are deadly streets, respectable streets, streets that are always clean, and streets that are invariably filthy ; artisan, industrial, and commercial streets. The streets of Paris, in short, possess human qualities, so that you cannot help forming certain ideas of them on a first impression. There are low streets where you would not care to linger, and streets in which you would like to live. Some, like the Rue Montmartre, for instance, turn a fair face on you at the first and end in a fish's tail. The Rue de la Paix is a wide and imposing street, but it arouses none of the nobly gracious thoughts which take a susceptible nature at unawares in the Rue Royale, while it certainly lacks the majesty which pervades the Place Vendôme.

If you walk through the Ile Saint-Louis the loneliness of the spot, the dreary look of the houses and great empty mansions is enough to account for the melancholy which settles on your nerves. The Ile Saint-Louis, a corpse no longer tenanted by farmers-general, is the Venice of Paris. The Place de la Bourse is garrulous, bustling, common ; it is only beautiful by

moonlight; an epitomized Paris in broad day, by night a dreamlike vision of ancient Greece.

Is not the Rue Traversière Saint-Honoré plainly a shameless street, with its villainous little houses for mistresses, a couple of windows in width, and vice, and crime, and misery on every floor? And there are thoroughfares with a North aspect, visited by the sun only three or four times in the year; deadly streets are they, where life is taken with impunity, and the law looks on and never interferes. In olden days the Parliament would probably have summoned the lieutenant of police to hear a little plain speaking, or at least they would have passed a vote of censure on the street, just as on another occasion they recorded their dissatisfaction with the wigs worn by the Chapter of Beauvais. Yet, M. Benoiston de Châteauneuf has shown conclusively that the mortality in certain streets is twice as high as the normal death-rate! And to sum up the matter in a single example: what is the Rue Fromenteau but a haunt of vice and murder?

These observations may be dark sayings for those who live beyond the bounds of Paris; but they will be apprehended at once by those students, thinkers, poets, and men of pleasure, who know the art of walking the streets of Paris, and reap a harvest of delights borne in on the tides of life that ebb and flow within her walls with every hour. For these, Paris is the most fascinating of monsters; here she is a pretty woman, there a decrepit pauper; some quarters are spick and span as the coins of a new reign, and a nook here and there is elegant as a woman of fashion.

A monster, indeed, is the great city, in every sense of the word! In the garrets you find, as it were, its brain full of knowledge and genius; the second floor is a digestive apparatus, and the stores below are unmistakable feet, whence all the busy foot-traffic issues.

Oh! what a life of incessant activity the monster leads! The final vibration of the last carriage returning from the ball

has scarcely died away before Its arms begin to stir a little at the barriers, and the City gives itself a gradual shake. All the gates begin to yawn, turning on their hinges like the membranes of some gigantic lobster invisibly controlled by some thirty thousand men and women. Each one of these thirty thousand must live in the allotted six square feet of space which serves as kitchen, workshop, nursery, bedroom, and garden; each one is bound to see everything, while there is scarce light enough to see anything. Imperceptibly the monster's joints creak, the stir of life spreads, the street finds a tongue, and by noon it is alive everywhere, the chimneys smoke, the monster feeds, and with a roar It stretches out its myraid paws. 'Tis a wonderful sight! And yet, oh Paris! who has not marveled at thy dark passages, thy fitful gleams of light, thy deep, soundless blind alleys? They who have not heard thy murmurs between midnight and two o'clock in the morning know nothing as yet of thy real poetry, of thy fantastic, broad contrast.

There are a very few amateurs, amateurs are they that can keep a steady head and take their Paris with gusto; and these know the physiognomy of the city so well that they know "even her spots, her blemishes, and her warts." Others may think of Paris as the monstrous marvel, as an astounding assemblage of brains and machinery in motion, as the City of a Hundred Thousand Romances, the head of the world. But for these who know her, Paris wears a dull or a gay face, she is ugly or fair, alive or dead; for them she is a living creature. Every room in a house is a lobe of the cellular tissue of the great courtesan, whose heart, and brain, and fantastic life they know to the uttermost. Therefore they are her lovers. They look up at a street corner, knowing that they shall see a clock face; they tell a friend with an empty snuff-box to "take such and such a turning, and you will find a tobacconist's store to the left, next-door to a confectioner that has a pretty wife."

For poets of this order, a walk through Paris is an expensive luxury. How refuse to spend a few minutes in watching the dramas, the accidents, the faces, the picturesque chance effects which importune you in the streets of the restless Queen of Cities that goes clad in placards, yet can boast not one clean corner, so complacent is she to the vices of the French nation. Who has not left home in the morning for the uttermost ends of Paris, and recognized by dinner-time the futility of his efforts to get away from the centre? Such as these will pardon these vagrant beginnings, which, after all, may be summed up by one eminently profitable and novel observation (so far as any observation can be novel in Paris where there is nothing new, not even the statue set up yesterday, on which the street urchin has left his mark already).

Well, then—there are certain streets, unknown for the most part by fashionable people, there are certain districts and certain houses to which a woman of fashion cannot go, unless she wishes that the most cruelly injurious constructions shall be put upon her errand. If she is a wealthy woman with a carriage of her own, and if she chooses to go on foot or disguised through one of these slums, her reputation as an honest woman is compromised. If, furthermore, it should so happen that she is seen about nine o'clock in the evening, the conjectures which an observer may permit himself are like to have appalling consequences. And, finally, if the woman is young and pretty; if she is seen to enter a house in one of these neighborhoods; if the house has a long, dark, damp, and reeking passage entry; if, at the end of the passage, a feeble, flickering lamp lights up the features of a hideous crone with bony fingers—then, to tell the truth in the interests of young and pretty women, that woman is lost. She is at the mercy of the first man of her acquaintance who chances to meet her in these foul ways.

And there is a street in Paris where such an encounter may end in a most dreadful and ghastly tragedy, a tragedy of

blood, a tragedy in the modern vein. Unluckily, the convincingness of the situation and the dramatic element in it will be lost, like the modern drama, upon all save the very few; and a sad pity it is that the tale must be told to a public that cannot fully appreciate the truth of the local color. Still, who can flatter himself that he will ever be understood? We all die unappreciated. It is the lot of women and of men of letters.

At half-past eight one February evening, thirteen years ago, a young man chanced to turn the corner of the Rue Pagevin into the Rue des Vieux-Augustins precisely at the point where the Rue Soly enters it. Now, at that time there was not a wall in the Rue Pagevin but echoed a foul word; the Rue Soly was one of the narrowest and least practicable thoroughfares in Paris, not excepting the least frequented nooks in the most deserted streets of the city; and the young man came there by one of those chances that do not come twice in a lifetime. Arrived at this point, he was walking carelessly along when he saw a woman a few paces ahead of him, and fancied that he saw in her a vague resemblance to one of the prettiest women in Paris, a beautiful and modest woman whom he secretly and passionately loved; loved, too, without hope. She was married. In a moment his heart gave a bound. An intolerable heat, kindled in his diaphragm, spread through every vein. He felt a cold chill along his spine, a tingling sensation on the surface of his face.

He was young, he was in love, he knew Paris. His perspicacity would not allow him to shut his eyes to all the vile possibilities of the situation—a young, fair, and wealthy woman of fashion stealing along the street with a guilty, furtive step! That She should be in that filthy neighborhood at that hour of night!

His love seems romantic, no doubt, and the more so because he was an officer in the Guards. Of a man in an infantry

regiment the thing is not inconceivable; but as a cavalry officer high in the service, he belonged to a division of the army that most desires rapid conquests. The cavalry are vain of their uniform, but they are vainer still of their success with women. Nevertheless, the officer's love was a genuine passion that will seem great to many a young heart. He loved the woman because she was virtuous. Her virtues, her reserved grace, the saintliness that awed him—these were the most precious treasures of his hidden passion. And she, in truth, was worthy of a Platonic love such as you sometimes find like a rare flower on the chronicler's page among the ruin and bloodshed of the Middle Ages. She was worthy to be the secret spring of all a young man's actions; the source of a love as high and pure as the blue heavens, a love without hope, to which a man clings because it never disappoints him, a love prodigal of uncontrolled delight, especially at an age when hearts are hot and imaginations poignant, and a man's eyes see very clearly.

There are strange, grotesque, inconceivable night effects to be seen in Paris; you cannot think, unless you have amused yourself with watching these, how fantastic a woman's shape can grow in the dusk. Sometimes the creature whom you follow by accident or design seems graceful and slender; sometimes a glimpse of a stocking, if it is very white, leads you to think that the outlines beneath are dainty and fine; a figure, muffled up, it may be, in a shawl or a pelisse, develops young luxuriant curves in the shadows; and as a last touch, the uncertain light from a store-window or a street lamp lends the stranger a fleeting halo, an illusion which stirs and kindles imagination to go beyond the truth. And then, the senses are stirred, color and life are put into everything, the woman is transfigured; her outward form grows fairer; there are moments when she is a woman no longer, she is an evil spirit, a will-of-the-wisp, drawing you farther and farther by a glowing magnetism until you reach—some decent dwelling,

and the poor housewife, terrified by your menacing approach, and quaking at the sound of a man's boots, promptly shuts the door in your face without giving you so much as a glance.

Suddenly the flickering light from a shoemaker's window fell across the woman in front; it struck just across the hollow of the back. Ah! surely those curves belonged to Her only among women! Who else knew that secret of chaste movement which all innocently brings the beauty of the most attractive shape into relief.

It was the same shawl and velvet bonnet that she wore in the morning. Not a speck on her gray stockings; not a trace of mud on her shoes. The shawl clung tightly about the outlines of her bust, vaguely moulding its exquisite contours; but the young man had seen those white shoulders in the ball-room, and he knew what a wealth of beauty was hidden beneath the shawl.

An intelligent observer can guess by the way in which a Parisienne wraps her shawl about her shoulders, by her manner of lifting her foot, on what mysterious errand she is bent. There is an indescribable tremor and lightness about her and her movements; she seems to weigh less, she walks on and on, or rather she threads her way like a spinning star, flitting, borne along by a thought, which the folds of her dress, the flutter of her skirts, betray.

The young man quickened his pace, passed, and turned his head to look at her—— Presto! She had disappeared down an entry, a wicket with a bell attached slammed and tinkled after her. He turned back and caught sight of her as she climbed the staircase at the end of the passage, not without obsequious greetings on the part of an old portress below. It was a crooked staircase, the lamplight fell full on the lower steps, up which the lady sprang lightly and briskly, as an impatient woman might do.

"Why impatient?" he asked himself, as he went back to plant himself against the opposite wall. He gazed up, luck-

less wight, watching every story as narrowly as if he were a detective on the track of a conspirator.

It was a house like thousands of others in Paris, mean, commonplace, narrow, dingy, with three windows on each of the four floors. The store and the entresol belonged to the shoemaker. The second-floor blinds were closed. Whither had the lady gone? He fancied that he heard the jingling of a door bell on the third floor. And, in fact, a light began to move in a room above, with two brightly illuminated windows, and presently appeared in a third window, hitherto in darkness, which seemed to belong to the parlor or dining-room. In a moment the vague shadow of a woman's bonnet appeared on the ceiling, the door was closed, the first room relegated to darkness, and the two farther windows shone red as before. Just then a voice cried: "Look out!" and something struck against the young man's shoulder.

"You don't seem to mind in the least what you are about," said the gruff voice. It was a workman, carrying a long plank on his shoulder. He went by. The man might have been sent as a warning by Providence to ask the prying inquirer: "What are you meddling for? Mind your own business, and leave Parisiennes to their own little affairs."

The officer folded his arms; and being out of sight of every one, he allowed two tears of rage to roll down his cheeks. The sight of these shadows moving across the windows was painful to him; he looked away up the Rue des Vieux-Augustins, and saw a hackney-coach drawn up under a blind wall, at a distance from any house-door or store-window.

Is it she? Or is it not? Life or death for a lover. And the lover waited in suspense for an age of twenty minutes. Then she came downstairs, and he knew past mistake that this was the woman whom he loved in his secret soul. Yet even now he tried to doubt. The fair stranger went to the cab and stepped into it.

"The house is always there," thought he; "I can search

it at any time ; " so he ran after the cab to make quite certain of the lady. Any remaining doubt was soon removed.

The vehicle stopped before an artificial flower store in the Rue de Richelieu, close to the Rue de Ménars. The lady alighted, entered the store, sent out the fare to the cabman, and chose some marabouts. Feather plumes for that black hair of hers, with her dark beauty ! She brought the feathers close to her face to judge of the effect. The officer fancied he could hear the store woman speaking.

" Nothing more becoming, madame, to a dark complexion ; there is something rather too hard about the contours of a brunette ; the marabouts impart just the fluffy touch which is wanting. Her grace the Duchesse de Langeais says that the feathers lend something vague and Ossianic, and a great distinction to the face."

" Well, send them to me at once."

With that the lady tripped away round the corner into the Rue de Ménars and entered her own house. The door closed upon her, and the young lover, his hopes lost, and double misfortune, his cherished beliefs lost too, went through Paris like a drunken man, till before long he found himself at his own door, with no very clear knowledge how he came there. He flung himself into an easy-chair, rested his feet on the fire-dogs, and sat, with his head in his hands, while his soaked boots first dried and then scorched on the bars. It was a dreadful hour for him ; he had come to one of those crises in a man's life when character is modified ; and the course of action of the best of men depends upon the first lucky or unlucky step that he chances to take ; upon Providence or Fate, whichever you choose.

He came of a good family, not that their nobility was of very ancient date ; but there are so few old houses left in these days that any young man comes of an old family. One of his ancestors had purchased the post of councilor to the Parliament of Paris, and in course of time became president. His sons,

with a fine fortune apiece, had entered the King's service, made good marriages, and arrived at Court. Then came the Revolution and swept them all away. One of them, however, an old and stubborn dowager, who had no mind to emigrate, remained in Paris, was put in prison, and lay there in danger of her life till the 9th Thermidor saved her, and finally she recovered her property. Afterward, at an auspicious moment in 1804, she sent for her grandson, Auguste de Maulincour, sole surviving scion of the Carbonnons de Maulincour, and in the characters of mother, noble, and self-willed dowager, brought him up with treble care.

At a later day, after the Restoration, Auguste de Maulincour, aged eighteen, entered the *Maison Rouge*, followed the Princes to Ghent, received a commission in the Guards, and at three-and-twenty was a major in a cavalry regiment—a superb position which he owed to his grandmother. And indeed, in spite of her age, the old lady knew her way at Court remarkably well.

This twofold biography, with some variations, is substantially the history of every family of emigrants, when blessed with debts and possessions, dowagers and tact.

Mme. la Baronne de Maulincour had a friend, the elderly Vidame de Pamiers, a sometime commander of the Knights of Malta. It was an eternal friendship of the kind that grows out of other ties formed sixty years ago, a friendship which nothing can destroy, because down in the depths of it lie secrets of the hearts of man and woman. These, if one had the time, would be well worth guessing; but such secrets, condensed into a score of lines, lose their savor; they should furnish forth instead some four volumes that might prove as interesting as "*Le Doyen de Killerine*"—a work which young men are wont to discuss and criticise and leave unread.

Auguste de Maulincour was connected, therefore, with the Faubourg Saint-Germain through his grandmother and the vidame; and with a name that dated two centuries back, he

could assume the airs and opinions of others who traced their descent from Clovis. Tall, pale, slender, and delicate-looking, a man of honor, whose courage, moreover, was undoubted (for he had fought duels without hesitation for the least thing in life)—he had never yet been on a field of battle, yet wore the cross of the Legion of Honor at his button-hole. He represented, as you see, one of the mistakes of the Restoration, perhaps one of its more pardonable mistakes.

The young manhood of the Restoration period was unlike the youth of any other epoch, in that it was placed between memories of the Empire on the one hand, and of exile on the other; between the old traditions of the Court and the conscientious bourgeois system of training for appointments; between bigotry and fancy dress-balls; between a Louis XVIII., who saw nothing but the present moment, and a Charles X., who looked too far ahead. The young generation was always halting between two political creeds; blind and yet clairvoyant, bound to accept the will of the King, knowing the while that the Crown was entering on a mistaken policy. The older men counted the younger as naught, and jealously kept the reins of government in their enfeebled hands at a time when the Monarchy might have been saved by their withdrawal and the accession of that young France at whom the old-fashioned doctrinaires and *émigrés* of the Restoration are still pleased to laugh.

Auguste de Maulincour was one victim of the ideas that weighed upon the youth of those days. It was in this wise: The Vidame de Pamiers, even at the age of sixty-seven, was still a very lively personage, who had both seen and lived a great deal. He told a story well, he was a man of honor and gallantry, but so far as women were concerned he held the most detestable opinions. He fell in love, but he did not respect women. *Women's* honor, *women's* sentiments? Fiddle-de-dee! folly and make-believe. In the company of women he believed in them, did this *ci-devant* "monster;" he

brought out their merits, he never contradicted a lady. But among friends, when women were the topic, the vidame laid it down as an axiom that the whole duty of a young man was to deceive women and to carry on several intrigues at once ; and that when a young man attempted to meddle with affairs of State, he made a gross mistake.

It is sad to be obliged to sketch such a hackneyed character. Where has he not appeared ? Is he not literally almost as worn out as the Imperial Grenadier ? But over M. de Maulincour the vidame exercised an influence which must be recorded ; he was a moralist after his own fashion, and he used to try to convert the young man to the doctrines of the great age of gallantry.

As for the dowager, she was a tender, pious woman, placed between her vidame and God ; a pattern of grace and sweetness, but none the less endowed with a persistence which never went beyond the bounds of good taste, and always triumphed in the end. She had tried to preserve her grandson in all the fair illusions of life ; she had brought him up on the best principles ; she had given him all her own delicacy of feeling, and had made a diffident man of him, and to all appearance an absolute fool. His boyish sensibility, untouched by contact with the world, had met with no rubs without ; so modest, so keenly sensitive was it, that actions and maxims to which the world attaches no importance grieved him sorely. He felt ashamed of his sensitiveness, hid it beneath a show of assurance, and suffered in silence, laughing in company at things which he revered in his secret heart. And therefore he was mistaken in his choice ; for by a common freak of Fate he, the man of mild melancholy, who saw love in its spiritual aspects, must needs fall in love with a woman who detested German sentimentalism. He began to distrust himself. He grew moody, hugged himself on his troubles, and made moan because he was not understood. And then—since we always desire a thing more vehemently

because it is hard to win—he continued to worship women with the ingenuous tenderness and feline delicacy of which they possess the secret ; perhaps, too, they prefer to keep the monopoly of it. And, indeed, though women complain that men love amiss, they have very little taste for the semi-feminine nature in man. Their whole superiority consists in making the man believe that he is their inferior in love ; for which reason they are quite ready to discard a lover when he is experienced enough to rob them of the fears in which they choose to deck themselves, to relieve them of the delicious torments of feigned jealousy, the troubles of disappointed hopes and vain suspense, and the whole train of dear feminine miseries, in short. Women hold Grandisons in abhorrence. What is more contrary to their nature than a tranquil, perfect love ? They must have emotions. Bliss without storms for them is not bliss at all. A soul great enough to bring the Infinite into love is as uncommon among women as genius among men. A great passion is as rare as a masterpiece. Outside this love there lies nothing but arrangements and passing excitations, contemptible, like all petty things.

In the midst of the secret disasters of his heart, while he was seeking some one who should understand him (that quest, by the way, is the lover's folly of our time), Auguste found a perfect woman—a woman with that indescribable touch of sacredness and holiness which inspires such reverence that love needs all the support of a long intimacy to declare itself. He found her in a circle as far as possible from his own, in the second sphere of that financial world in which great capitalists take the first place.

Then Auguste gave himself up wholly to the bliss of the most moving and profound of passions ; a purely contemplative love—a love made up of uncounted repressed longings, of shades of passion so vague, so deep, so fugitive, so vivid, that it is hard to find a comparison for them ; they are like sweet scents, or sunlight, or cloud shadows, like all things

that shine forth for a moment in the outer world to vanish, revive, and die, and leave a long wake of emotion in the heart. When a man is young enough to conceive melancholy and far-off hopes, to see in woman something more than a woman, can any greater happiness befall him than this—of loving so well that the mere contact of a white gloved hand, the light touch of a woman's hair, the sound of a voice, the chance of one look, fills him with a joy outpassing a fortunate lover's ecstasy of possession? And for this reason, none but slighted, shy, unattractive, unhappy men and women, unknown lovers, know all that there is in the sound of the voice of the one whom they love. It is because those fire-laden vibrations of the air have their source and origin in the soul itself that they bring hearts into communion with such violence, such lucid thought transference. So little misleading are they that a single modulation is often a revelation in itself. What enchantment is poured forth upon a poet's heart by the musical resonance of a low voice! What freshness it spreads through his soul, what visions it summons up! Love is in the voice before the eyes make confession.

Auguste, a poet after the manner of lovers—for there are poets who feel and poets who express, and the former are the happier—Auguste had known the sweetness of all those early joys, so far-reaching, so abundant. SHE was the possessor of such an entrancing voice as the most guileful of women might covet, that she might deceive others at her pleasure; hers were those silver notes, low only to the ear, that peal aloud through the heart, soothing the tumult and unrest that they stir.

And this was the woman who had gone at night to the Rue Soly in the neighborhood of the Rue Pagevin! He had seen her stealing into a house of ill-fame; and that most magnificent of passions had been brought low. The vidame's reasoning triumphed.

"If she is false to her husband, we will both avenge ourselves," said Auguste. And there was still love left in that

"if." The suspended judgment of Cartesian philosophy is a homage always due to virtue. The clocks struck ten; and Auguste de Maulincour bethought himself that the woman he loved must surely be going to a dance at a house that he knew. He dressed, went thither, and made a furtive survey of the rooms. Mme. de Nucingen, seeing him thus intent, came to speak to him.

"You are looking for Madame Jules; she has not yet come."

"Good-evening, dear," said a voice.

Mme. de Nucingen and Auguste both turned. There stood Mme. Jules dressed in white, simple and noble, wearing those very feathers which the baron had watched her choose in the store. That voice of Love went to his heart. If he had only known how to assert the slightest claim to be jealous of the woman before him, he would have turned her to stone then and there with the exclamation: "*Rue Soly!*" But he, a stranger, might have repeated those words a hundred times in Mme. Jules' ear, and she in astonishment would merely ask him what he meant. He stared at her with dazed eyes.

Ill-natured men who scoff at everything may, perhaps, find it highly amusing to discover a woman's secret, to know that her chastity is a lie, that there are strange thoughts in the depths beneath the quiet surface, and an ugly tragedy behind the pure forehead. But there are others, no doubt, who are saddened at heart by it; and many of the scoffers, when at home and alone with themselves, curse the world, and despise such a woman. This was how Auguste de Maulincour felt as he confronted Mme. Jules. It was a strange position. He and this woman exchanged a few words seven or eight times in a season—that was all; yet he was charging her with stolen pleasure of which she knew nothing, and pronouncing judgment without telling her of the accusation.

Many a young man has done the same and gone home broken-hearted because all is over between him and some

woman whom he once worshiped in his heart, and now scorns in his inmost soul. Then follow soliloquies heard of none, spoken to the walls of some lonely refuge; storms raised and quieted in the heart's depths, wonderful scenes of man's inner life which still await their painter.

M. Jules Desmarets made the round of the rooms, while his wife took a seat. But she seemed embarrassed in some way; and, as she chatted with her neighbor, she stole a glance now and again at her husband. M. Jules Desmarets was the Baron de Nucingen's stockbroker. And now for the history of the husband and wife.

M. Desmarets, five years before his marriage, was a clerk in a stockbroker's office; he had nothing in the world but his slender salary. But he was one of those men whom misfortune teaches to know life in a very few lessons, men who strike out their line and keep to it persistently as an insect; like other obstinate creatures he could sham death if anything stopped him, and weary out the patience of opponents by the perseverance of the woodlouse. Young as he was, he possessed all the republican virtues of the poor; he was sober, he never wasted his time, he set his face against pleasure. He was waiting. Nature, beside, had given him the immense advantage of a prepossessing exterior. His calm, pure forehead, the outlines of his placid yet expressive features, the simplicity of his manners, and everything about him, told of a hard-working, uncomplaining existence, of the high personal dignity which inspires awe in others, and of that quiet nobleness of spirit which is equal to all situations. His modesty impressed those who knew him with a certain respect. It was a solitary life, however, that he led in the midst of Paris. Society he saw only by glimpses during the few minutes spent on holidays in his employer's drawing-room.

In him, as in most men who lead such a life, there were astonishing depths of passion, inward forces too great to be brought into play by small occasions. His narrow means

compelled him to live like an ascetic, and he subdued his fancies with hard work. After growing pale over figures, he sought relaxation in a dogged effort to acquire the wider knowledge so necessary to any man that would make his mark in these days, whether in business, at the bar, in politics or letters. The one reef in the careers of these finer natures is their very honesty. They come across some penniless girl, fall in love, and marry her, and afterward wear out their lives in the struggle for existence, with want on the one hand, love on the other. Housekeeping bills will extinguish the loftiest ambition. Jules Desmarets went straight ahead upon that reef.

One evening, at his employer's house, he met a young lady of the rarest beauty. Love rapidly made such havoc as a passion can make in a lonely and slighted heart, when an unhappy creature's affections have been starved, and the fair hours of youth consumed by continual work. So certain are they to love in earnest, so swiftly does their whole being centre itself upon the woman to whom they are attracted, that when she is present they are conscious of exquisite sensations, in none of which she shares. This is the most flattering form of egoism for the woman who can see, beneath the apparent immobility of passion, the feeling stirred in depths so remote that it is long before it reappears at the human surface. Such unfortunates as these are anchorites in the heart of Paris; they know all the joys of anchorites; sometimes, too, they may yield to their temptations; but it still more frequently happens that they are thwarted, betrayed, and misinterpreted; and only very seldom are they permitted to gather the sweet fruits of the love that seems to them like a power dropped down from heaven.

A smile from his wife, a mere modulation of her voice, was enough to give Jules Desmarets a conception of the infinite of love. Happily the concentrated fire of passion within revealed itself artlessly to the woman for whom it burned,

And these two human creatures loved each other devoutly. To sum up all in a few words, they took each other by the hand without a blush, and went through the world together as two children, brother and sister, might pass through a crowd that makes way admiringly for them.

The young lady was in the odious position in which selfishness places some children at their birth. She had no recognized status; her name, Clémence, and her age were attested, not by a certificate of birth, but by a declaration made before a notary. As to her fortune, it was trifling. Jules Desmarets, hearing these bad tidings, was the happiest of men. If Clémence had belonged to some wealthy family, he would have despaired; but she was a poor love-child, the offspring of a dark, illicit passion. They were married. This was the beginning of a series of pieces of good fortune for Jules. Everybody envied him his luck; jealous tongues alleged that he succeeded by sheer good fortune, and left his merits and ability out of account.

Clémence's mother, nominally her godmother, bade Jules purchase a stockbroker's connection a few days after the wedding, promising to secure all the necessary capital. Such connections were still to be bought at moderate prices. On the great lady's recommendation, a wealthy capitalist made proposals on the most favorable terms to Jules Desmarets that evening in the stockbroker's own drawing-room, lent him money enough to exploit his business, and by the next day the fortunate clerk had bought his employer's connection.

In four years Jules Desmarets was one of the wealthiest members of his fraternity. Important clients had been added to the number of those left him by his predecessor. He inspired unbounded confidence; and from the manner in which business came to him, it was impossible but that he should recognize some occult influence due to his wife's mother, or, as he believed, to the mysterious protection of Providence.

Three years after the marriage Clémence lost her godmother.

By that time M. Jules, so called to distinguish him from his elder brother, whom he had established in Paris as a notary, was in receipt of an income of two hundred thousand livres. There was not such another happy couple in Paris. A five years' course of such unwonted love had been troubled but once by a slander, for which M. Jules took a single vengeance. One of his old associates said that M. Jules owed his success to his wife, and that influence in high places had been dearly bought. The inventor of the slander was killed in the duel that ensued. A passionate love so deeply rooted that it stood the test of marriage was much admired in society, though some women were displeased by it. It was pretty to see them together; they were respected, and made much of on all sides. M. and Mme. Jules were really popular, perhaps because there is no pleasanter sight than happy love; but they never stayed long in crowded rooms, and escaped to their nest as soon as they could, like two strayed doves.

The nest, however, was a fine large house in the Rue de Ménars, in which artistic feeling tempered the luxury which the city man is always supposed to display. Here, also, M. and Mme. Jules entertained splendidly. Social duties were somewhat irksome to them; but, nevertheless, Jules Desmarets submitted to such exactions, knowing that sooner or later a family will need acquaintances. He and his wife lived like plants in a hothouse in a stormy world. With very natural delicacy, Jules carefully kept the slander from his wife's knowledge as well as the death of the man that had almost troubled their felicity.

Mme. Jules, with her artistic temper and refinement, had inclinations toward luxury. In spite of the terrible lesson of the duel, there were incautious women to hint in whispers that Mme. Jules must often be pinched for money. Her husband allowed her twenty thousand francs for her dress and pocket-money, but this could not possibly be enough, they said, for her expenses. And, indeed, she was often more daintily dressed

in her own home than in other people's houses. She only cared to adorn herself for her husband's eyes, trying in this way to prove to him that for her he was all the world. This was love indeed, pure love, and more than this, it was happy as clandestine love sanctioned by the world can be. M. Jules was still his wife's lover, and more in love every day. Everything in his wife, even her caprices, made him happy. When she had no new fancy to gratify, he felt as much disturbed as if this had been a symptom of bad health.

It was against this passion that Auguste de Maulincour, for his misfortune, had dashed himself. He loved Madame Clémence Jules to distraction. And yet even with a supreme passion in his heart he was not ridiculous, and he lived the regular garrison life, yet even with a glass of champagne in his hand he wore an abstracted air. His was the quiet scorn of existence, the clouded countenance worn alike on various pretexts by jaded spirits, by men but little satisfied with the hollowness of their lives, and by the victims of pulmonary disease or heart troubles. A hopeless love or a distaste for existence constitutes a sort of social position nowadays.

To take a queen's heart by storm were perhaps a more hopeful enterprise than a madly conceived passion for a woman happily married. Auguste de Maulincour had sufficient excuse for his gravity and dejection. A queen has always the vanity of her power; her height above her lover places her at a disadvantage; but a well-principled bourgeoisie, like a hedgehog or an oyster, is encompassed about with awkward defenses.

At this particular moment Auguste stood near his undeclared lady. She, certainly, was incapable of carrying on a double intrigue. There sat Mme. Jules in childlike composure, the least guileful of women, gentle, full of queenly serenity. What depths can there be in human nature? The baron, before addressing her, kept his eyes on husband and wife in turn. What reflections did he not make! In a minute's

space he recomposed a second version of Young's "Night Thoughts." And yet—the rooms were filled with dance music, and the light of hundreds of wax-tapers streamed down upon them. It was a banker's ball, one of those insolent fêtes by which the world of dull gold attempted to rival that other world of gilded rank and ormolu, the world where the high-born Faubourg Saint-Germain was laughing yet, all unconscious that a day was approaching when capitalists would invade the Luxembourg and seat a king on the throne. Conspiracy used to dance in those days, giving as little thought to future bankruptcies of Power as to failures ahead in the financial world. M. le Baron de Nucingen's gilded salons wore that look of animation which a fête in Paris is wont to wear; there is gayety, at any rate, on the surface. The wit of the cleverer men infects the fools, while the beaming expression characteristic of the latter spreads over the countenances of their superiors in intellect; and the whole room is brightened by the exchange. But gayety in Paris is always a little like a display of fireworks; pleasure, coquetry, and wit all coruscate, and then die out like spent rockets. To-morrow morning, wit, coquetry, and pleasure are put off and forgotten.

"Heigho!" thought Auguste, as he came to a conclusion, "are women really after all as the vidame sees them? Certain it is that of all the women dancing here to-night, not one seems so irreproachable as Madame Jules. And Madame Jules goes to the Rue Soly!"

The Rue Soly was like a disease, the mere word made his heart contract.

"Do you never dance, madame?" he began.

"This is the third time that you have asked me that question this winter," she answered, smiling.

"But perhaps you have never given me an answer."

"That is true."

"I knew quite well that you were false, like all women——"

Mme. Jules laughed again.

"Listen to me, monsieur. If I told you my real reason for not dancing, it would seem ridiculous to you. There is no insincerity, I think, in declining to give private reasons at which people usually laugh."

"Any confidence, madame, implies a degree of friendship of which I, no doubt, am unworthy. But it is impossible that you should have any but noble secrets, and can you think me capable of irreverent jesting?"

"Yes," she said. "You, like the rest of men, laugh at our purest feelings and misconstrue them. Beside, I have no secrets. I have a right to love my husband before all the world; I am proud of it, I tell you; and if you laugh at me when I say that I never dance with any one else, I shall have the worst opinion of your heart."

"Have you never danced with any one but your husband since your marriage?"

"No, monsieur. I have leaned on no other arm, no one else has come very close to me."

"Has not your doctor so much as felt your pulse?"

"Ah, well, now you are laughing."

"No, madame, I admire you because I can understand. But you suffer others to hear your voice, to see you, to—— In short, you permit our eyes to rest admiringly on you——"

"Ah, these things trouble me," she broke in. "If it were possible for husband and wife to live like lover and mistress, I would have it so; for in that case——"

"In that case, how came you to be out, on foot and disguised, a few hours ago, in the Rue Soly?"

"Where is the Rue Soly?" asked she, not a trace of emotion in her clear voice, not the faintest quiver in her features. She did not redden, she was quite composed.

"What! You did not go up the stairs to the third floor in a house at the corner of the Rue des Vieux-Augustins and the Rue Soly? You had not a cab waiting for you ten paces away? and you did not return to a store in the Rue de Rich-

elieu, where you chose the feathers in your hair at this moment?"

"I did not leave my house this evening." She told the lie with an imperturbable laughing face; she fanned herself as she spoke; but any one who could have laid a hand on her girdle at the back, might perhaps have felt that it was damp. Auguste bethought himself of the vidame's teaching.

"Then it was some one extraordinarily like you," he rejoined with an air of belief.

"Sir," said she, "if you are capable of following a woman about to detect her secrets, you will permit me to tell you that such a thing is wrong, very wrong, and I do you the honor of declining to believe it of you."

The baron turned away, took up his position before the hearth, and seemed thoughtful. He bent his head, but his eyes were fixed stealthily upon Mme. Jules. She had forgotten the mirrors on the walls, and glanced toward him two or three times with an evident dread in her eyes. Then she beckoned to her husband, laid a hand upon his arm, and rose to go through the rooms. As she passed M. de Maulincour, who was talking with a friend, he said aloud, as if in answer to a question—

"A woman that certainly will not sleep quietly to-night——"

Mme. Jules stopped, flung him a crushing, disdainful glance, and walked away, all unaware that one more such glance, if her husband chanced to see it, would imperil the happiness and the lives of two men.

Auguste, consumed with rage smouldering in the depths of his soul, soon afterward left the room, vowing to get to the bottom of this intrigue. He looked around for Mme. Jules before he went, but she had disappeared.

Here were the elements of a tragedy suddenly put into a young head, an eminently romantic head, as is generally the case with those who have not realized their dreamed-of love

to the full. He adored Mme. Jules in a new aspect ; he loved her with the fury of jealousy, with the agonized frenzy of despair. The woman was false to her husband ; she had come down to the ordinary level. Auguste might give himself up to all the felicity of success, imagination opened out for him the vast field of the transports of possession. In short, if he had lost an angel, he had found the most tantalizing of devils. He lay down to build castles in the air, and to justify Mme. Jules. Some errand of charity had brought her there, he told himself, but he did not believe it. He made up his mind to devote himself entirely to the investigation of the causes and motives involved in this mysteriously hidden knot. It was a romance to read ; or better, it was a drama to act, and he was cast for a part in it.

It is a very fine thing to play the detective for one's own ends and for passion's sake. Is it not an honest man's chance of enjoying the amusements of the thief ? Still, you must be prepared to boil with helpless rage, to growl with impatience, to stand in mud till your feet are frozen, to shiver and burn and choke down false hopes. You must follow up any indication to an end unknown ; and miss your chance, storm, improvise lamentations and dithyrambs for your own benefit, and utter insensate exclamations before some harmless passer-by, who stares back at you in amazement. You take to your heels and overturn good souls with their apple-baskets, you wait and hang about under a window, you make guesses by the running hundred. Still it is sport, and Parisian sport ; sport with all its accessories save dogs, and guns, and tally-ho. Nothing, except some moments in the gambler's life, can compare with it. A man's heart must needs be swelling with love and revenge before he will lie in ambush ready to spring like a tiger on his prey ; before he can find enjoyment in watching all that goes on in the quarter ; for interest of many kinds abounds in Paris without the added pleasure of stalking game. How should one soul suffice a man for all this ? What

is it but a life made up of a thousand passions, a thousand feelings, and thoughts?

Auguste de Maulincour flung himself heart and soul into this feverish life, because he felt all its troubles and joys. He went about Paris in disguise; he watched every corner of the Rue Pagevin and the Rue des Vieux-Augustins. He ran like a lamplighter from the Rue de Ménars to the Rue Soly, and back again from the Rue Soly to the Rue de Ménars, all unconscious of the punishment or the reward in store for so many pains, such measures, such shifts! And even so, he had not yet reached the degree of impatience which gnaws the vitals and brings the sweat to a man's brow; he hung about in hope. It occurred to him that Mme. Jules would scarcely risk another visit for some few days after detection. So he devoted those first few days to an initiation into the mysteries of the street. Being but a novice in the craft, he did not dare to go to the house itself and question the janitor and the shoemaker; but he had hopes of securing a post of observation in rooms exactly opposite those inscrutable apartments. He made a careful survey of the ground; he was trying to reconcile caution with impatience, his great love, and the inscrutable secret.

By the beginning of March he was in the midst of his preparations for making a great decisive move, when official duties summoned him from his chessboard one afternoon about four o'clock, after an assiduous course of sentry-duty, for which he was not a whit the wiser. In the Rue Coquillière he was caught by one of the heavy showers which swell the stream in the gutters in a moment, while every drop falling into the roadside puddles raises a bell-shaped splash. A foot-passenger in such a predicament is driven to take refuge in a store or café if he can afford to pay for shelter; or, at urgent need, to hurry into some entry, the asylum of the poor and shabbily dressed. How is it that as yet no French painter has tried to give us that characteristic group, a crowd of Par-

isians weather-bound under an archway? Where will you find better material for a picture?

To begin with, is there not the pensive or philosophical pedestrian who finds a pleasure in watching the slantwise streaks of rain in the air against the gray background of sky—a fine chased work something like the whimsical shapes taken by spun glass? Or he looks up at the whirlpools of white water, blown by the wind like a luminous dust over the house-roofs, or at the fitful discharges of the wet, foaming gutter-pipes. There are, in fact, a thousand nothings to wonder at, and the idlers are studying them with keen relish, although the owner of the premises treats them to occasional thumps from the broom-handle while pretending to be sweeping out the gateway.

There is the chatty person who grumbles and talks with the porter's wife, while she rests on her broom as a grenadier leans on his gun; there is the poverty-stricken individual glued fantastically to the wall—he has nothing to dread from such contact; for his rags, they are already so well acquainted with the street; there is the man of education who studies, spells out, or even reads the advertisements, and never gets to the end of them; there is the humorous person who laughs at the mud-bedraggled women, and makes eyes at the people in the windows opposite; there is the mute refugee that scans every casement on every floor, and the working man or woman with a mallet or a bundle, as the case may be, translating the shower into probable losses or gains. Then there is the amiable man, who bounces in like a bombshell with an "Oh! what weather, gentlemen!" and raises his hat to the company; and, finally, there is your true Parisian bourgeois, a weatherwise citizen who never comes out without his umbrella; he knew beforehand that it was going to rain, but he came out in spite of his wife's advice, and now he is sitting in the porter's chair.

Each member of this chance assembled group watches the

sky in his own characteristic fashion, and then skips away for fear of splashing his boots, or goes because he is in a hurry and sees other citizens walking past in spite of wind and weather, or because the courtyard is damp and like to give you your death of cold—the selvedge, as the saying goes, being worse than the cloth. Every one has his own reasons for going, until no one is left but the prudent pedestrian, who waits to see a few blue chinks among the clouds before he goes on his way.

M. de Maulincour, therefore, took refuge with a tribe of foot-passengers under the porch of an old-fashioned house with a courtyard not unlike a gigantic chimney-shaft. There were so many stories rising to a height on all sides, and the four plastered walls, covered with greenish stains and saltpetre ooze, were traversed by such a multitude of gutters and spouts, that they would have put you in mind of the cascades of St. Cloud. From every direction came the sound of falling water; it foamed, splashed, and gurgled; it gushed forth in streams, or black, or white, or blue, or green; it hissed and gathered volume under the broom wielded by the janitor's wife, a toothless crone of great experience in storms, who seemed to bless the waters as she swept down a host of odds and ends into the street. A curious inventory of the rubbish would have told you a good deal about the lives and habits of the lodgers on every floor. There were tea-leaves, cuttings of chintz, discolored and spoilt petals of artificial flowers, vegetable refuse, paper, and scraps of metal. Every stroke of the old woman's broom laid bare the heart of the gutter, that black channel paved with chessboard squares, on which every janitor wages desperate war. The luckless lover gazed intently at this picture, one of the many thousands which bustling Paris composes every day; but he saw it all with unseeing eyes, until he looked up and found himself face to face with a man that had just come in.

This man was, at any rate to all appearance, a beggar.

Not a Parisian beggar, that human creature for which human speech has found no name as yet ; but a novel type, a beggar cast in some different mould, and apart from all the associations called up by that word. The stranger was not by any means remarkable for that peculiarly Parisian character, which frequently startles us in those unfortunates whom Charlet drew, and often enough with a rare felicity ; the Paris beggar with the coarse face plastered with mud, the red bulbous nose, the toothless but menacing mouth, the eyes lighted up by a profound intelligence which seems out of place—a servile terrific figure. Some of the impudent vagabonds have mottled, chapped, and veined countenances, rugged foreheads, and thin, dirty locks that put you in mind of a worn-out wig lying in the gutter. Jolly in their degradation and degraded amid their jollity, debauchery has set its unmistakable mark on them, they hurl their silence at you like a reproach, their attitude expresses appalling thoughts. They are ruthless, are these dwellers between beggary and crime ; they circle at a safe distance round the gallows, steering clear of the law in the midst of vice, and vicious within the bounds of law. While they often provoke a smile, they set you thinking.

One, for instance, represents stunted civilization ; he comprehends it all, thieves' honor, patriotism, and manhood, with the perverse ingenuity of the common criminal and the subtlety of kid-gloved rascality. Another is resigned to his lot ; he is pastmaster in mimicry, but a dull creature. None of them are exempt from passing fancies for work and thrift ; but the social machinery thrusts them down into their filth, without caring to discover whether there may not be poets, or great men, or brave men, or a whole wonderful organization among the beggars in the streets, those gypsies of Paris. Like all masses of men who have suffered, the beggar tribes are supremely good and superlatively wicked ; they are accustomed to endure nameless ills, and a fatal power keeps them on a level with the mud of the streets. And every one

of them has a dream, a hope, a happiness of his own, which takes the shape of gambling, or the lottery, or drink.

There was nothing of this strange life about the man who was propping himself, very much at his ease, against the wall opposite M. de Maulincour; he looked like a fancy portrait sketched by an ingenious artist on the back of some canvas returned to the studio.

He was lank and lean; his leaden-hued visage revealed glacial depths of thought; his ironical bearing, and a dark look, which plainly conveyed his claim to treat every man as his equal, dried up any feeling of compassion in the hearts of the curious. His complexion was a dingy white; his wrinkled, hairless head bore a vague resemblance to a block of granite. A few grizzled, lank locks on either side of his face straggled over the collar of a filthy overcoat buttoned up to the chin. There was something of a Voltaire about him, something, too, of a Don Quixote; melancholy, scornful, sarcastic, full of philosophical ideas, but half insane. Apparently he wore no shirt. His beard was long. His shabby black cravat was so slit and worn that it left his neck on exhibition, and a protuberant, deeply furrowed throat, on which the thick veins stood out like cords. There were wide, dark bruised circles about his eyes. He must have been at least sixty years old. His hands were white and clean. His shoes were full of holes, and trodden down at the heels. A pair of much-mended blue trousers, covered with a kind of pale fluff, added to the squalor of his appearance.

Perhaps the man's wet clothes exhaled a nauseous stench; perhaps at any time he had about him that odor of poverty peculiar to Paris slums—for slums, like offices, vestries, and hospitals, have a special smell, and a stale, rancid, fetid, unimaginable reek it is. At any rate, the man's neighbors edged away and left him alone. He glanced round at them, and then at the officer; it was an unmoved, expressionless look; the look for which M. de Talleyrand was so famous, a survey

made by lack-lustre eyes with no warmth in them. Such a look is an inscrutable veil beneath which a strong mind can hide deep feeling, and the most accurate calculations as to men, affairs, and events. Not a wrinkle deepened in his countenance. Mouth and forehead were alike impassive, but his eyes fell, and there was something noble, almost tragic, in their slow movement. A whole drama lay in that droop of the withered eyelids.

The sight of this stoical face started M. de Maulincour upon those musings that begin with some commonplace question and wander off into a whole world of ideas before they end. The storm was over and gone. M. de Maulincour saw no more of the man than the skirts of his overcoat trailing on the curb-stone; but as he turned to go he saw that a letter had just dropped at his feet, and guessed that it belonged to the stranger, for he had noticed that he put a bandana handkerchief back into his pocket. M. de Maulincour picked up the letter to return it to its owner, and unthinkingly read the address—

MOSIEUR FERRAGUSSE,

Rue des Grands-Augustins, at the corner of the
Rue Soly.

PARIS.

TO MOSIEUR.

There was no postmark on the letter, and at sight of the address M. de Maulincour hesitated to return it; for there are few passions which will not turn base in the long length. Some presentiment of the opportuneness of the treasure-trove crossed the baron's mind. He would keep the letter, and so acquire a right to enter the mysterious house, never doubting but that the man lived therein. Even now a suspicion, vague as the beginning of daylight, connected the stranger with Mme. Jules. Jealous lovers will suppose anything; and it is by this very process of supposing everything and selecting the

more probable conjectures that examining magistrates, spies, lovers, and observers get at the truth which they have an interest in discovering.

“Does the letter belong to him? Is it from Mme. Jules?”

His restless imagination flung a host of questions to him at once, but at the first words of the letter he smiled. Here it follows word for word in the glory of its artless phrases; it was impossible to add anything to it, and short of omitting the letter itself, nothing could be taken away. It has been necessary, however, to revise the orthography and the punctuation; for in the original there are neither commas nor stops, nor so much as a note of exclamation, a fact that strikes at the root of the system by which modern authors endeavor to render the effect of the great disasters of every kind of passion:

“HENRY” (so it ran), “of all the sacrifices that I have had to make for your sake, this is the hardest, that I mayn’t give you news of myself. There is a voice that I must obey, which tells me I ought to let you know all the wrong you’ve done me. I know beforehand that you are that hardened by vice that you will not stoop to pity me. Your heart must be deaf to all feeling; is it not deaf to the cry of nature? Not that it matters much. I am bound to let you know the degree to which you are to blame, and the horror of the position in which you have put me. You knew how I suffered for my first fall, Henry, yet you could bring me to the same pass again, and leave me in my pain and despair. Yes, I own I used to think you loved and respected me, and that helped me to bear up. And now what is left to me? I have lost all that I cared most about, all that I lived for, parents, friends, and relations, and character, and all through you. I have given up everything for you, and now I have nothing before me but shame and disgrace and, I don’t blush to say it, want. It only needed your scorn and hatred to make my

misery complete ; and now I have that as well, I shall have courage to carry out my plans. I have made up my mind—it's for the credit of my family—I shall put an end to my troubles. You must not think hardly of the thing that I am going to do, Henry. It is wicked, I know, but I can't help myself. No help, no money, no sweetheart to comfort me—can I live? No, I can't. What must be, must. So in two days, Henry, two days from now, your Ida will not be worthy of your respect ; but take back the solemn promise I made you, so as I may have an easy conscience, for I shall not be unworthy of your regard. Oh, Henry, my friend, for I shall never change to you, promise to forgive me for the life I'm going to lead. It is love that gives me courage, and it is love that will keep me right. My heart will be so full of your image that I shall still be true to you. I pray heaven on my bended knees not to punish you for all the wrong you have done, for I feel that there is only one thing wanting among my troubles, and that is the pain of knowing that you are unhappy. In spite of my plight, I will not take any help from you. If you had cared about me, I might have taken anything as coming from friendship ; but my soul rises up against a kindness as comes from pity, and I should demean myself more by taking it than him that offered it. I have one favor to ask. I don't know how long I shall have to stop with Mme. Meynardie, but be generous enough to keep out of my sight there. Your last two visits hurt me so that it was a long time before I got over it ; but I don't mean to go into any particulars of your behavior in that respect. You hate me—you said so ; the words are written on my heart, and freeze it with cold. Alas ! just when I want all my courage, my wits desert me. Henry dear, before I put this bar between us, let me know for the last time that you respect me still ; write me, send me an answer, say that you respect me if you don't love me any more. I shall always be able to look you in the face, but I don't ask for a sight of you ; I am

so weak, and I love you so, that I don't know what I might do. But, for pity's sake, write me a line at once ; it will give me courage to bear my misery. Farewell, you have brought all my troubles upon me, but you are the one friend that my heart has chosen, and will never forget. IDA."

This young girl's life, her disappointed love, her ill-starred joys, her grief, her dreadful resignation to her lot, the humble poem summed up in so few words, produced a moment's effect upon M. de Maulincour. He asked himself, as he read the obscure but essentially Parisian tragedy written upon the soiled sheet, whether this Ida might not be connected in some way with Mme. Jules ; whether the assignation that he chanced to witness that evening was not some charitable effort on her part. Could that aged, poverty-stricken man be Ida's betrayer ? The thing bordered on the marvelous. Amusing himself in a maze of involved and incompatible ideas, the baron reached the neighborhood of the Rue Pagevin just in time to see a hack stop at the end of the Rue des Vieux-Augustins nearest the Rue Montmartre. Every driver on the stand had something to say to the new arrival.

"Can *she* be in it ?" he thought.

His heart beat with hot, feverish throbs. He pushed open the wicket with the tinkling bell, but he lowered his head as he entered ; he felt ashamed of himself, a voice in his inmost soul cried :

"Why meddle in this mystery ?"

At the top of a short flight of steps he confronted the old woman.

"Monsieur Ferragus ?"

"Don't know the name——"

"What ! Doesn't Monsieur Ferragus live here ?"

"No name of the sort in the house."

"But my good woman——"

"I'm not a 'good woman,' sir ; I am the portress."

"But, madame, I have a letter here for Monsieur Ferragus."

"Oh! if you have a letter, sir," said she, with a change of tone, "that is quite another thing. Will you just let me see it—that letter?"

Auguste produced the folded sheet. The old woman shook her head dubiously over it, hesitated, and seemed on the point of leaving her lodge to acquaint the mysterious Ferragus with this unexpected incident. At last she said: "Very well, go upstairs, sir. You ought to know your way up——"

Without staying to answer a remark which the cunning crone possibly meant as a trap, the young officer bounded up the stairs and rang loudly at the third-floor door. His lover's instinct told him: "*She* is here."

The stranger of the archway, the "orther" of Ida's troubles, answered the door himself, and showed a clean countenance, a flowered gown, a pair of white flannel trousers, and a neat pair of carpet-slippers. Mme. Jules' face appeared behind him in the doorway of the inner room; she grew white, and dropped into a chair.

"What is the matter, madame?" exclaimed Auguste, as he sprang toward her.

But Ferragus stretched out an arm and stopped the young man short with such a well-delivered blow that Auguste reeled as if an iron bar had struck him on the chest.

"Stand back, sir! What do you want with us? You have been prowling about the quarter these five or six days. Perhaps you are a spy?"

"Are you Monsieur Ferragus?" retorted the baron.

"No, sir."

"At any rate, it is my duty to return this paper which you dropped under an archway where we both took shelter from the rain."

As he spoke and held out the letter, he glanced round the room in spite of himself. Ferragus' room was well but

plainly furnished. There was a fire in the grate. A table was set, more sumptuously than the man's apparent position and the low rent of the house seemed to warrant. And lastly, he caught a glimpse of a heap of gold coins on a *console* just inside the next room, and heard a sound from thence which could only be a woman's sobbing.

"The letter is mine, thank you," said the stranger, turning round in a way intended to convey the hint that the baron had better go, and that at once.

Too inquisitive to notice that he himself was being submitted to a thorough scrutiny, Auguste did not see the semi-magnetic glances, the devouring gaze which the stranger turned upon him. If he had met those basilisk eyes, he would have seen his danger, but he was too violently in love to think of himself. He raised his hat, went downstairs, and back to his own home. What could a meeting of three such persons as Ida, Ferragus, and Mme. Jules mean? He might as well have taken up a Chinese puzzle, and tried to fit the odd-shaped bits of wood together without a clue.

But Mme. Jules had seen him; Mme. Jules went to the house; Mme. Jules had lied to him. Next day he would call upon her; she would not dare to refuse to see him; he was now her accomplice; he was hand and foot in this shady intrigue. Already he began to play the sultan, and thought how he would summon Mme. Jules to deliver up all her secrets.

Paris was afflicted in those days with a rage for building. If Paris is a monster, it is assuredly of all monsters the most subject to sudden rage. The city takes up with a thousand whimsies. Sometimes Paris begins to build like some great lord with a passion for bricks and mortar; then the trowel is dropped in an attack of military fever, every one turns out in a National Guard's uniform, and goes through the drill and smokes cigars, but the fit does not last; martial exercises are suddenly abandoned, and the cigar is thrown away. Then Paris begins to feel low, becomes insolvent, sells its effects in

the Place du Châtelet, and files its petition; but in a few days all is straight again, and the city puts on festival array and dances. One day the city fills hands and mouth with barley-sugar, yesterday it bought "*Papier Weynen*;" to-day the monster has the toothache, and plasters every wall with advertisements of *Alexipharmques*, and to-morrow it will lay in a store of cough lozenges. Paris has the craze of the season or of the month as well as the rage of the day; and at this particular time everybody was building or pulling down something. What they built or pulled down no one knows to this day, but there was scarce a street in which you did not see erections of scaffolding, poles, planks, and cross-bars lashed together at every story. The fragile structures, covered with white plaster dust, quivered under the tread of the Limousin bricklayers and shook with the vibrations of every passing carriage in spite of the protection of wooden hoardings, which people are bound to erect around the monumental buildings that never rise above their foundations. There is a nautical suggestion about the mast-like poles and ladders and rigging and the shouts of the bricklayers.

One of these temporary erections stood not a dozen paces away from the Hôtel Maulincour, in front of a house that was being built of blocks of free-stone. Next day, just as the Baron de Maulincour's cab passed by the scaffolding on the way to Mme. Jules, a block two feet square slipped from its rope-cradle at the top of the pole, turned a somersault, fell, and killed the manservant at the back of the vehicle. A cry of terror shook the scaffolding and the bricklayers. One of the two, in peril of his neck, could scarcely cling to the pole; it seemed that the block struck him in passing. A crowd quickly gathered. The men came down in a body, with shouts and oaths, declaring that M. de Maulincour's cab had shaken their crane. Two inches more, and the stone would have fallen on the baron's head. It was an event in the quarter. It got into the newspapers.

M. de Maulincour, sure that he had touched nothing, brought an action for damages. The law stepped in. It turned out upon inquiry that a boy with a wooden lath had mounted guard to warn passengers to give the building a wide berth, and with that the affair came to an end. M. de Maulincour must even put up with the loss of his manservant and the fright that he had had. He kept his bed for several days, for he had been bruised by the breakage of the cab, and he was feverish after the shock to his nerves. So there was no visit paid to Mme. Jules.

Ten days later, when he went out of doors for the first time, he drove to the Bois de Boulogne in the now repaired cab. He turned down the Rue de Bourgogne, and had reached the sewer just opposite the Chamber of Deputies, when the axle snapped in the middle. The baron was driving so fast that the two wheels swerved and met with a shock that must have fractured his skull if it had not been for the hood of the vehicle, and, as it was, he sustained serious injury to the ribs. So for the second time in ten days he was brought home more dead than alive to the weeping dowager.

This second accident aroused his suspicions. He thought, vaguely however, of Mme. Jules and Ferragus; and by way of clearing up his suspicions, he had the broken axle brought into his bedroom, and sent for his coach-builder. The man inspected the fracture, and proved two things to M. Maulincour's mind. First, that the axle never came from his establishment, for he made a practice of cutting his initials roughly on every one that he supplied. How this axle had been exchanged for the previous one he was at a loss to explain. And secondly, he found that there was a very ingeniously contrived flaw in the iron bar, a kind of cavity made by a blowpipe while the metal was hot.

"Eh! Monsieur le Baron, a man had need to be pretty clever to turn out an axle-tree on that pattern; you could swear it was natural——"

M. de Maulincour asked the man to keep his own counsel, and considered that he had had a sufficient warning. The two attempts on his life had been plotted with a skill which showed that his were no common enemies.

"It is a war of extermination," said he, turning restlessly on his bed, "a warfare of savages, ambushes, and treachery, a war declared in the name of Madame Jules. In whose hands is she? And what power can this Ferragus wield?"

M. de Maulincour, brave man and soldier though he was, could not help shivering when all was done and said. Among the thoughts that beset him, there was one which found him defenseless and afraid. How if these mysterious enemies of his should resort next to poison? Terror, exaggerated by fever and low diet, got the better of him in his weak condition. He sent for an old attached servant of his grandmother's, a woman who loved him with that almost motherly affection through which an ordinary nature reaches the sublime. Without telling her all that was in his mind, he bade her buy all necessary articles of food for him, secretly, and every day at a fresh place; and at the same time, he warned her to keep everything under lock and key, and to allow no one whatsoever to be present while she prepared his meals. In short, he took the most minute precautions against this kind of death. He was lying ill in bed; he had therefore full leisure to consider his best way of defending himself, and love of life is the only craving sufficiently clairvoyant to allow human egoism to forget nothing. But the luckless patient had himself poisoned his own life with dread. Every hour was overshadowed by a gloomy suspicion that he could not throw off. Still, the two lessons in murder had taught him one qualification indispensable to a politic man; he understood how greatly dissimulation is needed in the complex action of the great interests of life. To keep a secret is nothing; but to be silent beforehand, to forget, if necessary, for thirty years, like Ali Pasha, the better to ensure a revenge pondered

during those thirty years—this is a fine study in a country where few men can dissemble for thirty days together.

By this time Mme. Jules was Auguste de Maulincour's whole life. His mind was always intently examining the means by which he might win a triumph in his mysterious duel with unknown antagonists. His desire for this woman grew the greater by every obstacle. Amid all his thoughts Mme. Jules was always present in his heart of hearts; there she stood more irresistible now in her imputed sin than she used to be with all the undoubted virtues for which he had once worshipped her.

The sick man, wishing to reconnoitre the enemy's position, thought there could be no danger in letting the old commander into the secret. The commander loved Auguste as a father loves his wife's children; he was shrewd and adroit, he was of a diplomatic turn of mind. So the commander came, heard the baron's story, and shook his head, and the two held counsel. Auguste maintained that in the days in which they lived the detective force and the powers that be were equal to finding out any mysteries, and that if there was absolutely no other way the police would prove powerful auxiliaries. The commander, the vidame, did not share his young friend's confidence or his convictions.

"The police are the biggest bunglers on earth, dear boy, and the powers that be are the feeblest of all things where individuals are concerned. Neither the authorities nor the police can get to the bottom of people's minds. If they discover the causes of a fact that is all that can reasonably be expected of them. Now the authorities and the police are eminently unsuited to a business of this kind; the personal interest which is not satisfied till everything is found out is essentially lacking in them. No human power can prevent a murderer or a poisoner from reaching a prince's heart or an honest man's stomach. It is passion that makes the complete detective."

With that the vidame strongly advised his young friend the baron to travel. Let him go to Italy, and from Italy to Greece, and from Greece to Syria and Asia, and come back only when his mysterious enemies should be convinced of his repentance. In his way he would conclude a tacit peace with them. Or, if he stayed, he had better keep to his house, and even to his room, since there he could secure himself against the attacks of this Ferragus, and never leave it except to crush the enemy once for all.

"A man should never touch his enemy except to smite off his head," the vidame said gravely.

Nevertheless, the old man promised his favorite that he would bring all the astuteness with which heaven had gifted him to bear on the case, and that, without committing any one, he would send a reconnoitring party into the enemy's camp, know all that went on there, and prepare a victory.

The vidame had in his service a retired Figaro, as mischievous a monkey as ever took human shape. In former times the man had been diabolically clever, and a convict's physical frame could not have responded better to all demands made upon it; he was agile as a thief and subtle as a woman, but he had fallen into the decadence of genius for want of practice. New social conditions in Paris have reformed the old valets of comedy. The *emeritus* Scapin was attached to his master as to a being of superior order; but the crafty vidame used to increase the annual wage of his sometime provost of gallantry by a tolerably substantial sum, in such sort that the natural ties of good-will were strengthened by the bond of interest, and the old vidame received in return such watchful attention as the tenderest of mistresses could scarcely devise in a lover's illness. In this relic of the eighteenth century, this peril of old-world stage-servants, this minister incorruptible (since all his desires were gratified)—the vidame and M. de Maulincour both put their trust.

"Monsieur le Baron would spoil it all," said the great man

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in livery, summoned by the vidame to the council. "Let monsieur eat and drink and sleep in peace. I will take it all upon myself."

And indeed, a week afterward, when M. de Maulincour, now perfectly recovered, was breakfasting with his grandmother and the vidame, Justin appeared to make his report. The dowager went back to her rooms, and he began with that false modesty which men of genius affect—

"Ferragus is not the real name of the enemy in pursuit of Monsieur le Baron. The man, the devil rather, is called Gratien, Henri, Victor, Jean-Joseph Bourignard. The said Gratien Bourignard used to be a builder and contractor; he was a very rich man at one time; and most of all, he was one of the prettiest fellows in Paris, a Lovelace that might have led Grandison himself astray. My information goes no further. He once was a common workman; the journeymen of the order of Dévorants elected him as their head, with the name of Ferragus XXIII. The police should know that, if they are there to know anything. The man has moved, and at present is lodging in the Rue Joquelet. Madame Jules Desmarets often goes to see him. Her husband pretty often sets her down in the Rue Vivienne on his way to the Bourse; or she leaves her husband at the Bourse, and comes back that way. Monsieur le Vidame knows so much in these matters that he will not expect me to tell him whether the husband rules the wife or the wife rules her husband, but Madame Jules is so pretty that I should bet on her. All this is absolutely certain. My Bourignard often goes to gamble at number 129. He is a gay dog, with a liking for women, saving your presence, and has his amours like a man of condition. As for the rest, he is frequently in luck, he makes up like an actor and can take on any face he likes; he just leads the queerest life you ever heard of. He has several addresses, I have no doubt, for he nearly always escapes what Monsieur le Vidame calls 'parliamentary investigation.' If monsieur wishes, however, the

man can be got rid of decently, leading such a life as he does. It is always easy to get rid of a man with a weakness for women. Still, the capitalist is talking of moving again. Now, have Monsieur le Vidame and Monsieur le Baron any orders to give?"

"I am pleased with you, Justin. Go no further in the affair without instructions, but keep an eye on everything here, so that Monsieur le Baron shall have nothing to fear." He turned to Maulincour. "Live as before, dear boy," he said, "and forget Madame Jules."

"No, no," said Auguste, "I will not give her up to Gratien Bourignard; I mean to have him bound hand and foot and Madame Jules as well."

That evening Auguste de Maulincour, recently promoted to a higher rank in the Guards, went to a ball in Mme. la Duchesse de Berri's apartments at the Élysée-Bourbon. There, surely, was no fear of the slightest danger; and yet the Baron de Maulincour came away with an affair of honor on his hands, and no hope of arranging it. His antagonist, the Marquis de Ronquerolles, had the strongest reasons for complaining of him; the quarrel arose out of an old flirtation with M. de Ronquerolle's sister, the Comtesse de Sérizy. This lady, who could not endure high-flown German sentiment, was all the more particular with regard to every detail of the prude's costume in which she appeared in public. Some fatal inexplicable prompting moved Auguste to make a harmless joke, Mme. de Sérizy took it in very bad part, and her brother took offense. Explanations took place in whispers in a corner of the room. Both behaved like men of the world, there was no fuss of any kind; and not till next day did the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and the château hear what had happened. Mme. de Sérizy was warmly defended; all the blame was thrown on Maulincour. August persons intervened. Seconds of the highest rank were imposed on M. de Maulincour and M. de Ronquerolles; every

precaution was taken on the ground to prevent a fatal termination.

Auguste's antagonist was a man of pleasure, not wanting, as every one admitted, in a sense of honor; it was impossible to think of the marquis as a tool in the hands of Ferragus, Chief of Dévorants; and yet, as Auguste de Maulincour stood up before his man, in his own mind he felt a wish to obey an unaccountable instinct, and to put a question to him.

"Gentlemen," he said, addressing his seconds, "I emphatically do not refuse to stand Monsieur de Ronquerolles' fire; but, first, I own that I was in fault, I will make the apology which he is sure to require, and even in public if he wishes it; for, when a lady is in the case, there is nothing, I think, dishonoring to a gentleman in such an apology. So I appeal to his commonsense and generosity, isn't there something rather senseless in fighting a duel when the better cause may happen to get the worst of it?"

But M. de Ronquerolles would not hear of such a way out of the affair. The baron's suspicions were confirmed. He went across to his opponent.

"Well, Monsieur le Marquis," he said, "will you pledge me your word as a noble, before these gentlemen, that you bear me no grudge save the one for which ostensibly we are to fight?"

"Monsieur, that is a question which ought not to be put to me."

M. de Ronquerolles returned to his place. It was agreed beforehand that only one shot should be fired on either side. The antagonists were so far apart that a fatal end for M. de Maulincour seemed problematical, not to say impossible; but Auguste dropped. The bullet had passed through his ribs, missing the heart by two finger-breadths. Luckily, the extent of the injury was not great.

"This was no question of revenge for a dead passion; you aimed too well, monsieur, for that," said the baron.

M. de Ronquerolles, thinking that he had killed his man, could not keep back a sardonic smile.

"Julius Cæsar's sister, monsieur, must be above suspicion."

"Madame Jules again!" exclaimed Auguste, and he fainted away before he could finish the caustic sarcasm that died on his lips. He had lost a good deal of blood, but his wound was not dangerous. For a fortnight his grandmother and the vidame nursed him with the lavish care which none but the old, wise with the experience of a lifetime, can give. Then one morning he received a rude shock. It came from his grandmother. She told him that her old age, the last days of her life, were filled with deadly anxiety. A letter addressed to her and signed "F." gave her the history of the espionage to which her grandson had stooped; it was given in full from point to point. M. de Maulincour was accused of conduct unworthy a man of honor. He had posted an old woman (so it was stated) near the hack-stand in the Rue de Ménars. Nominally his wrinkled spy supplied water to the cabmen, but really she was stationed there to watch Mme. Jules Desmarets. He had deliberately set himself to play the detective on one of the most harmless men in the world, and tried to find out all about him when secrets which concerned the lives of three persons were involved. Of his own accord he had entered upon a pitiless struggle, in which he had been wounded three times already, and must inevitably succumb at last; for his death had been sworn; every human power would be exerted to compass it. It was too late for M. de Maulincour to escape his doom by a promise to respect the mysterious life of these three persons; for it was impossible to believe the word of a gentleman who could sink so low as the level of a police spy. And for what reason? To disturb, without cause, the existence of an innocent woman and a respectable old man.

The letter was as nothing to Auguste compared with the Baronne de Maulincour's loving reproaches. How could he fail to trust and respect a woman? How could he play the

spy on her when he had no right to do so? Had any man a right to spy on the woman whom he loved? There followed a torrent of excellent reasoning which never proves anything. It put the young man for the first time of his life into one of those towering passions from which the most decisive actions of life are apt to spring.

"If this is to be a duel to the death" (so he concluded), "I am justified in using every means in my power to kill my enemy."

Forthwith the vidame, on behalf of M. de Maulincour, waited on the superintendent of the detective force in Paris, and gave him a full account of the adventure, without bringing Mme. Jules' name into the story, although she was the secret knot of all the threads. He told him, in confidence, of the fears of the Maulincour family, thus threatened by some unknown person, an enemy daring enough to vow such vengeance on an officer in the Guards, in the teeth of the law and the police. He of the police was so much surprised that he raised his green spectacles, blew his nose two or three times, and offered his mull to the vidame, who said, to save his dignity, that he never took snuff, though his countenance was bedabbled with rappee. The head of the department took his notes, and promised that, with the help of Vidocq and his sleuth hounds, the enemy of the Maulincour family should be accounted for in a very short time; there were no mysteries, so he was pleased to say, for the Paris police.

A few days afterward, the superintendent came to the Hôtel Maulincour to see M. le Vidame, and found the baron perfectly recovered from his last injuries. He thanked the family in formal style for the particulars which they had been so good as to communicate, and informed them that the man Bourignard was a convict sentenced to twenty years' penal servitude, and that in some miraculous way he made his escape from the gang on the way from Bicêtre to Toulon. The police had made fruitless efforts to catch him for the past fifteen years;

they learned that he had very recklessly come back to live in Paris; and there, though he was constantly implicated in all sorts of shady affairs, hitherto he had eluded the most active search. To cut it short, the man, whose life presented a great many most curious details, was certain to be seized at one of his numerous addresses and given up to justice. This red-tape personage concluded his official report with the remark that, if M. de Maulincour attached sufficient importance to the affair to care to be present at Bourignard's capture, he might repair to such and such a number in the Rue Sainte-Foi at eight o'clock next morning. M. de Maulincour, however, felt that he could dispense with this method of making certain; he shared the feeling of awe which the police inspires in Paris; he felt every confidence in the diligence of the local authorities.

Three days afterward, as he saw nothing in the newspapers about an arrest which surely would have supplied material for an interesting article, M. de Maulincour was beginning to feel uncomfortable, when the following letter relieved his mind:

“MONSIEUR LE BARON:—I have the honor to announce that you need no longer entertain any fears whatsoever with regard to the matter in hand. The man Gratien Bourignard, alias Ferragus, died yesterday at his address, number 7 Rue Joquelet. The suspicions which we were bound to raise as to his identity were completely set at rest by facts. The doctor of the prefecture was specially sent by us to act in concert with the doctor of the mayor's office, and the superintendent of the preventive police made all the necessary verifications, so that the identity of the body might be established beyond question. The personal character, moreover, of the witnesses who signed the certificate of death, and the confirmatory evidence of those who were present at the time of the said Bourignard's death—including that of the curé of the Bonne-

Nouvelle, to whom he made a last confession (for he made a Christian end)—all these things taken together do not permit us to retain the slightest doubt.

“Permit me, M. le Baron, to remain, etc.”

M. de Maulincour, the dowager, and the commander drew a breath of unspeakable relief. She, good woman, kissed her grandson while a tear stole down her cheeks, and then crept away to give thanks to God. The dear dowager had made a nine days’ prayer for Auguste’s safety, and believed that she had been heard.

“Well,” said the vidame, “now you can go to that ball that you were speaking about; I have no more objections to make.”

M. de Maulincour was the more eager to go to this ball since Mme. Jules was sure to be there. It was an entertainment given by the prefect of the Seine in whose house the two worlds of Paris society met as on a neutral ground. Auguste de Maulincour went quickly through the rooms, but the woman who exerted so great an influence on his life was not to be seen. He went into a still empty card-room, where the tables awaited players, sat himself down on a sofa, and gave himself up to the most contradictory thoughts of Mme. Jules, when some one grasped him by the arm; and, to his utter amazement, he beheld the beggar of the Rue Coquillière, Ida’s Ferragus, the man who lived in the Rue Soly, Justin’s Bourignard, the convict that had died the day before.

“Not a sound, not a word, sir!” said Bourignard. Auguste knew that voice, though to any other it would surely have seemed unrecognizable.

The man was very well dressed; he wore the insignia of the Golden Fleece and the star of the Legion of Honor.

“Sir,” he hissed out like a hyena, “you warrant all my attempts on your life by allying yourself with the police. You shall die, sir. There is no help for it. Are you in love with

Madame Jules? Did she once love you? What right have you to trouble her peace and smirch her reputation?"

Somebody else came up. Ferragus rose to go.

"Do you know this man?" asked M. de Maulincour, seizing Ferragus by the collar.

But Ferragus slipped briskly out of his grasp, caught M. de Maulincour by the hair, and shook him playfully several times.

"Is there absolutely nothing but a dose of lead that will bring you to your senses?" he replied.

"I am not personally acquainted with him," said de Marsay, who had witnessed this scene, "but I know that this gentleman is Monsieur de Funcal, a very rich Portuguese."

M. de Funcal had vanished. The baron went off in pursuit, he could not overtake him, but he reached the peristyle in time to see a splendid equipage and the sneer on Ferragus' face, before he was whirled away out of sight.

"For pity's sake, tell me where Monsieur de Funcal lives," said Auguste, betaking himself to de Marsay, who happened to be an acquaintance.

"I do not know, but somebody here no doubt can tell you."

In answer to a question put to the prefect, Auguste learned that the Comte de Funcal's address was at the Portuguese embassy. At that moment, while he fancied that he could still feel those ice-cold fingers in his hair, he saw Mme. Jules, in all the splendor of that beauty, fresh, graceful, unaffected, radiant with the sanctity of womanhood, which drew him to her at the first. For him this creature was infernal; Auguste felt nothing for her now but hate—hate that overflowed in murderous, terrible glances. He watched for an opportunity of speaking to her alone.

"Madame," he said, "three times already your bravos have missed me——"

"What do you mean, sir?" she answered, reddening. "I heard with much concern that several bad accidents had

befallen you; but how can I have had anything to do with them?"

"You knew that the man in the Rue Soly has hired rufians on my track?"

"Sir!"

"Madame, henceforth I must call you to account not only for my happiness, but also for my life-blood——"

Jules Desmarets came up at that moment.

"What are you saying to my wife, sir?"

"Come to my house to inquire if you are curious to know." And Maulincour went. Mme. Jules looked white and ready to faint.

There are very few women who have not been called upon, once in their lives, to face a definite, pointed, trenchant question with regard to some undeniable fact, one of those questions which a husband puts in a pitiless way. The bare thought of it sends a cold shiver through a woman; the first word pierces her heart like a steel blade. Hence the axiom, "All women are liars." They tell lies to spare the feelings of others, white lies, heroic lies, hideous lies; but falsehood is incumbent upon them. Once admit this, does it not follow of necessity that the lies ought to be well told? Women tell lies to admiration in France. Our manners are an excellent school for dissimulation. And, after all, women are so artlessly insolent, so charming, so graceful, so true amid falsehood, so perfectly well aware of the value of insincerity as a means of avoiding the rude shocks which put happiness in peril, that falsehood is as indispensable to them as cotton-batting for their jewelry. Insincerity furnishes forth the staple of their talk, and truth is only brought out occasionally. They speak truth, as they are virtuous, from caprice or speculation. The methods vary with the individual character. Some women laugh and lie, others weep, or grow grave, or put themselves in a passion.

They begin life with a feigned indifference to the homage

which gratifies them most ; they often end by insincerity with themselves. Who has not admired their seeming loftiness when they are trembling the while for the mysterious treasure of love ? Who has not studied the ease, the ready wit, the mental disengagement with which they confront the greatest embarrassments of life ? Everything is quite natural ; deceit flows out as snowflakes fall from the sky.

And yet what skill women have to discover the truth in another ! How subtly they can use the hardest logic, in answer to the passionately uttered question that never fails to yield up some heart secret belonging to their interlocutor, if a man is so guileless as to begin with questioning a woman. If a man begins to question a woman, he delivers himself into her hand. Will she not find out anything that he means to hide, while she talks and says nothing ? And yet there are men that have the audacity to enter upon a contest of wits with a Parisienne—a woman who can put herself out of reach of a thrust with “ You are very inquisitive ! ” “ What does it matter to you ? ” “ Oh ! you are jealous ! ” “ And how if I do not choose to answer you ? ” A Parisienne, in short, has a hundred and thirty-seven thousand ways of saying No, while her variations on the word YES surpass computation. Surely one of the finest diplomatic, philosophic, logographic, and moral performances which remain to be made would be a treatise on No and YES. But who save an androgynous being could accomplish the diabolical feat ? For which reason it will never be attempted. Yet of all unpublished works, is there one better known or more constantly in use among women ?

Have you ever studied the conduct, the pose, the *disinvoltura* of a lie ? Look at it now. Mme. Jules was sitting in the right-hand corner of her carriage, and her husband to her left. She had contrived to repress her emotion as she left the ballroom, and by this time her face was quite composed. Her husband had said nothing to her then ; he said nothing

now. Jules was staring out of the window at the dark walls of the silent houses as they drove past ; but suddenly, just as they turned the corner of a street, he seemed to come to some determination, he looked intently at his wife. She seemed to feel cold in spite of the fur-lined pelisse in which she was wrapped ; she looked pensive, he thought, and perhaps she really was pensive. Of all subtly communicable moods, gravity and reflection are the most contagious.

“What can Monsieur de Maulincour have said to move you so deeply ?” began Jules. “And what is this that he wishes me to hear at his house ?”

“Why, he can tell you nothing at his house that I cannot tell you now,” she replied.

And with that woman’s subtlety, which is always slightly dishonoring to virtue, Mme. Jules waited for another question. But her husband turned his head away and resumed his study of arched gateways. Would it not mean suspicion and distrust if he asked any more ? It is a crime in love to suspect a woman ; and Jules had already killed a man, without a doubt of his wife. Clémence did not know how much deep passion and reflection lay beneath her husband’s silence ; and little did Jules imagine the extraordinary drama which locked his wife’s heart from him. And the carriage went on and on through silent Paris, and the husband and wife, two lovers who idolized each other, nestled softly and closely together among the silken cushions, a deep gulf yawning between them all the while.

How many strange scenes take place in the elegant coupés which pass through the streets between midnight and one o’clock in the morning after a ball ! The carriages alluded to, be it understood, are fitted with transparent panes of glass, and lamps that not merely light up the brougham itself, but the whole street as well on either side ; they belong to law-sanctioned love, and the law gives a man a right to sulk and fall out with his wife, and kiss and make it up again, in a

coupé or anywhere else. So married couples are at liberty to quarrel without fear of being seen by passers-by. And how many secrets are revealed to foot-passengers in the dark streets, to the young bachelors who drove to the ball and, for some reason or other, are walking home afterward! For the first time in their lives, Jules and Clémence leaned back in their respective corners; usually Desmarets pressed close to his wife's side.

"It is very cold," said Mme. Jules. But her husband heard nothing; he was intent on reading all the dark signs above the stores.

"Clémence," he began at last, "forgive me for this question that I am about to ask?"

He came nearer, put his arm about her waist, and drew her toward him.

"Oh, dear! here it comes!" thought poor Clémence.

"Well," she said aloud, anticipating the question, "you wish to know what Monsieur de Maulincour was saying to me? I will tell you, Jules; but, I am afraid. Ah, God! can we have secrets from each other? A moment ago I knew that you were struggling between the consciousness that we love each other and a vague dread; but that consciousness that we love each other is unclouded, is it not? and do not your doubts seem very shadowy to you? Why not stay in the light that you love? When I have told you everything, you will wish to know more; and, after all, I myself do not know what is lurking under that man's strange words. And then, perhaps, there would be a duel, ending in a death. I would far rather that we both put that unpleasant moment out of our minds. But, in any case, give me your word to wait till this most extraordinary adventure is entirely cleared up in some natural way.

"Monsieur de Maulincour declared that those three accidents of which you heard—the block of stone that killed his servant, the carriage accident, and the duel about Madame de

Sérizy—were all brought upon him by a plot which I had woven against him. And he threatened to explain my reasons for wishing to murder him to you.

“Can you make anything out of all this? It was his face that disturbed me; there was madness in it; his eyes were haggard; he was so excited that he could not bring out his words. I felt sure that he was mad. That was all. Now, I should not be a woman if I did not know that, for a year past, Monsieur de Maulincour has been, as they say, quite wild about me. He has never met me except at dances; we have never exchanged any words but ballroom small-talk. Perhaps he wants to separate us, so that I may be left defenseless and alone some day. You see how it is! You are frowning already. Oh, I detest the world with all my heart! We are so happy without it, why should we go in search of society? Jules, I beg of you, promise me that you will forget all this! I expect we shall hear to-morrow that Monsieur de Maulincour has gone out of his mind.”

“What an extraordinary thing!” said Jules to himself, as he stepped out into the peristyle of his own abode.

And here, if this story is to be developed by giving it in all its truth of detail, by following its course through all its intricacies, there must be a revelation of some of the secrets of love—secrets learned by slipping under the canopy of a bed-chamber, not brazenly, but after the manner of Puck, without startling either Jeanie or Dougal, or anybody else. For this venture, one had need be chaste as our noble French language consents to be, and daring as Gérard’s brush in his picture of Daphnis and Chloe.

Mme. Jules’ bedroom was a sacred place. No one but her husband and her maid was allowed to enter it. Wealth has great privileges, and the most enviable of them all is the power of carrying out thoughts and feelings to the uttermost; of quickening sensibility by fulfilling its myriad caprices; of encompassing that inner life with a splendor that exalts it,

elegance that refines, and the subtle shades of expression that enhance the charm of love.

If you particularly detest picnic dinners and meals badly served ; if you feel a certain pleasure at the sight of dazzling white damask, plate, exquisite porcelain, and richly carved and gilded tables lit up by translucent tapers ; if you have a taste for miracles of the most refined culinary art beneath silver coverings with armorial bearings ; then, if you have a mind to be consistent, you must come down from the heights of your garret, and you must leave the grisettes in the street. Garrets and grisettes, like umbrellas and hinged clogs, must be left to people who bring tickets to the doors of restaurants to pay for their dinners ; and you must think of love as something rudimentary, only to be developed in all its charm by a gilded fireside, in a room made deaf to all sound from without by drawn blinds and closed shutters and thick curtain folds, while the opal light of a Parian lamp falls over soft carpets from the Savonnerie and the silken hangings on the walls. You must have mirrors to reflect each other, to give you an infinite series of pictures of the woman in whom you would fain find many women, of her to whom Love gives so many forms. There should be long, low sofas, and a bed like a secret which you guess before it is revealed ; and soft furs spread for bare feet on the floor of the dainty chamber, and wax tapers under glass shades, and white gauze draperies, so that you can see to read at any hour of the night ; and flowers without too heavy-sweet a scent, and linen fine enough to satisfy Anne of Austria.*

This delicious scheme had been carried out by Mme. Jules. But that is nothing ; any woman of taste might do as much ; though, nevertheless, there is a certain touch of personality in the arrangement of these things, a something which stamps this ornament or that detail with a character of its own. The fanatical cult of individuality is more prevalent than ever in

* Her chemise could be passed through a finger-ring.

these days. Rich people in France are beginning to grow more and more exclusive in their tastes and belongings than they have been for the past thirty-years. Mme. Jules knew that her programme must be carried out consistently; that everything about her must be part of a harmonious whole of luxury which make a fit setting for love.

"Fifteen hundred francs and my Sophie," or "Love in a Cottage," is the sort of talk to expect from famished creatures, and brown bread does very well at first; but if the pair are really in love, their palates grow nicer, and in the end they sigh for the riches of the kitchen. Love holds toil and want in abhorrence, and would rather die at once than live a miserable life of hand to mouth.

Most women after a ball are impatient for sleep. Their rooms are strewn with limp flowers, scentless bouquets, and ball-gowns. Their little thick shoes are left under an arm-chair, they totter across the floor in their high-heeled slippers, take the combs out of their hair, and shake down their tresses without a thought of their appearance. Little do they care if they disclose to their husbands' eyes the clasps and pins and cunning contrivances which maintained the dainty fabric in erection. All mystery is laid aside, all pretense dropped for the husband—there is no make-up for him. The corset of the reparative kind, fearfully and wonderfully made, is left lying about if the sleepy waiting-woman forgets to put it away. Whalebone stiffening, sleeves encased in buckram, delusive finery, hair supplied by the coiffeur, the whole factitious woman, in fact, lies scattered about. *Dissecta membra poetæ*, the artificial poetry so much admired by those for whose benefit the whole was conceived and elaborated, the remains of the pretty woman of an hour ago, encumber every corner, while the genuine woman in slatternly disorder, and the crumpled nightcap of yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow, presents herself yawning to the arms of a husband who yawns likewise.

"For, really, monsieur, if you want a pretty nightcap to rumple every night, you must increase my allowance."

Such is life as it is. A woman is always old and unattractive to her husband; always smart, dainty, and dressed in her best for that Other, every husband's rival, the world that slanders women or picks them to pièces.

Mme. Jules did quite otherwise. Love, like all other beings, has its own instinct of self-preservation. Inspired by love, constantly rewarded by happiness, she never failed in the scrupulous performance of little duties in which no one can grow slack, for by such means love is kept unimpaired by time. Are not these pains, these tasks imposed by a self-respect which becomes her passing well? What are they but sweet flatteries, a way of reverencing the beloved in one's own person?

So Mme. Jules had closed the door of her dressing-room on her husband; there she changed her ball-gown and came out dressed for the night, mysteriously adorned for the mysterious festival of her heart. The chamber was always exquisite and dainty; Jules, when he entered it, found a woman coquettishly wrapped in a graceful, loose gown, with her thick hair twisted simply about her head. She had nothing to fear from dishevelment; she robbed Love's sight and touch of nothing. This woman was always simpler and more beautiful for him than for the world—a woman revived by her toilet, a woman whose whole art consisted in being whiter than the cambrics that she wore, fresher than the freshest scent, more irresistible than the wildest courtesan. In a word, she was always loving, and therefore always beloved. In this admirable skill in *le métier de femme*—in the art and mystery of being a woman—lay the great secret of Joséphine's charm for Napoleon, of Cesonia's influence over Caligula in older times, of the ascendancy of Diane de Poitiers over Henri II. And if this secret is so potent in the hands of women who have counted seven or eight lustres, what a weapon is it for a

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young wife! The prescribed happiness of fidelity becomes rapture.

Mme. Jules had been particularly careful of her toilet for the night. After that conversation which froze the blood in her veins with terror, and still caused her the liveliest anxiety, she meant to be exquisitely charming, and she succeeded. She fastened her cambric dressing-gown, leaving it loose at the throat, and let her dark hair fall loosely over her shoulders. An intoxicating fragrance clung about her after her scented bath, her bare feet were thrust into velvet slippers. Jules, in his dressing-gown, was standing meditatively by the fire, with his elbow on the mantelpiece, and one foot on the fender. Feeling strong on her vantage-ground, she tripped across to him and laid a hand over his eyes. Then she whispered, close to his ear, so closely that he could feel her warm breath on him and the tips of her teeth: "What are you thinking about, monsieur?"

With quick tact, she held him closely to her and put her arms about him to snatch him away from his gloomy thoughts. A woman who loves knows well how to use her power; and the better the woman, the more irresistible is her coquetry.

"Of you," said he.

"Only of me?"

"Yes!"

"Oh! that was a very doubtful 'Yes!'"

They went to bed. As Mme. Jules fell asleep she thought: "Decidedly, de Maulincour will bring about some misfortune. Jules is preoccupied and absent-minded; he has thoughts which he does not tell me."

Toward three o'clock in the morning Mme. Jules was awakened by a foreboding that knocked at her heart while she slept. She felt, physically and mentally, that her husband was not beside her. She missed Jules' arm, on which her head had lain nightly for five years, while she slept happily and peacefully, an arm that never wearied of the weight. A voice

cried: "Jules is in pain! Jules is weeping!" She lifted her head, sat upright, felt that her husband's place was cold, and saw him sitting by the fire, his feet on the fender, his head leaning back in the great armchair. There were tears on his cheeks. Poor Clémence was out of bed in a moment, and sprang to her husband's knee.

"Jules, what is it? Are you not feeling well? Speak, tell me; oh, speak to me, if you love me."

She poured out a hundred words of the deepest tenderness. Jules, at his wife's feet, kissed her knees, her hands. The tears flowed afresh as he answered—

"Clémence, dear, I am very wretched. It is not love if you cannot trust your mistress, and you are my mistress. I worship you, Clémence, even while I doubt you. The things that man said last night went to my heart; and, in spite of me, they stay there to trouble me. There is some mystery underneath this. Indeed, I blush to say it, but your explanation did not satisfy me. Commonsense sheds a light on it which love bids me reject. It is a dreadful struggle. How could I lie there with your head on my shoulder and think that there were thoughts in your mind that I did not know? Oh, I believe you, I believe in you," he exclaimed, as she smiled sadly and seemed about to speak. "Say not a word, reproach me with nothing. The least little word from you would break my heart. And, beside, could you say a single thing that I have not said to myself for the last three hours? Yes, for three hours I lay, watching you as you slept, so beautiful you were, your forehead looked so quiet and pure. Ah! yes, you have always told me all your thoughts, have you not? I am alone in your inmost heart. When I look into the depths of your eyes, I read all that lies there. Your life is always as pure as those clear eyes. Ah! no, there is no secret beneath their transparent gaze."

He rose and kissed her eyelids.

"Let me confess it to you, beloved; all through these five

years one thing has made me happier day by day, I have been glad that you should have none of the natural affections which always encroach a little upon love. You had neither sister nor father nor mother nor friend ; I was neither above nor below any other in thy heart ; I was there alone. Clémence, say over again for me all the intimate sweet words that you have spoken so often ; do not scold me ; comfort me, I am very wretched. I have a hateful suspicion to reproach myself with, while you have nothing burning in your heart. Tell me, my darling, may I stay by your side ? How should two that are so truly one rest their heads on the same pillow, when one is at peace and the other in pain ? What can you be thinking of ? ” he cried abruptly, as Clémence looked meditative and confused, and could not keep back the tears.

“ I am thinking of my mother,” she said gravely. “ You could not know, Jules, how it hurt your Clémence to recall her mother’s last farewells, while your voice, the sweetest of all music, was sounding in her ears ; to remember the solemn pressure of the chill hand of a dying woman, while I felt your caresses, and the overpowering sense of the sweetness of your love.”

She made him rise, and held him tightly, with far more than man’s strength, in her arms ; she kissed his hair, her tears fell over him.

“ Oh ! I could be hacked into pieces for you ! Tell me, beyond doubt, that I make you happy, that for you I am the fairest of women, that I am a thousand women for you. But you are loved as no other man can ever be loved. I do not know what the words ‘ duty,’ ‘ virtue’ mean. Jules, I love you for your own sake ; it makes me happy to love you ; I shall always love you ; better and better, till my last sigh. I take a kind of pride in my love. I am sure that I am fated to know but the one great love in my life. Perhaps this that I am going to say is wicked, but I am glad to have no children, I wish for none. I feel that I am more a wife than a

mother. Have you any fears? Listen to me, my love; promise me to forget, not this hour of mingled love and doubt, but that madman's words. I ask it, Jules. Promise me not to see him again, to keep away from his house. I have a feeling that if you go a single step further in that labyrinth, we shall both sink into depths where I shall die, with your name still on my lips, your heart in my heart. Why do you put me so high in your inmost life, and so low in the outer? You can take so many men's fortunes on trust, and you cannot give me the alms of one doubt? And when, for the first time in your life, you can prove that your faith in me is unbounded, would you dethrone me in your heart? Between a lunatic and your wife, you believe the lunatic's word? Oh! Jules——"

She broke off, flung back the hair that fell over her forehead and throat, and in heart-rending tones she added, "I have said too much. A word should be enough. If there is still a shadow across your mind and your forehead, however faint it may be, mind, it will kill me."

She shivered in spite of herself, and her face grew white.

"Oh! I will kill that man," said Jules to himself, as he caught up his wife and carried her to the bed. "Let us sleep in peace, dear angel," he said aloud; "I have put it all out of mind, I give you my word."

The loving words were repeated more lovingly, and Clémence slept. Jules, watching his sleeping wife, told himself, "She is right. When love is so pure, a suspicion is like a blight. Yes, and a blight on so innocent a soul, so delicate a flower, is certain death."

If between two human creatures, each full of love for the other, with a common life at every moment, there should arise a cloud, the cloud will vanish away, but not without leaving some trace of its passage behind. Perhaps their love grows deeper, as earth is fairer after the rain; or perhaps the shock reverberates like distant thunder in a blue sky; but, at any

rate, they cannot take up life where it was before, love must increase or diminish. At breakfast, M. and Mme. Jules showed each other an exaggerated attention. In their glances there was an almost forced gayety which might have been expected of people eager to be deceived. Jules had involuntary suspicions; his wife, a definite dread. And yet, feeling sure of each other, they had slept. Was the embarrassment due to want of trust? to the recollection of the scene in the night? They themselves could not tell. But they loved each other, and were loved so sincerely, that the bitter-sweet impression could not fail to leave its traces; and each, beside, was so anxious to be the first to efface them, to be the first to return, that they could not but remember the original cause of a first discord. For those who love, vexation is out of the question, and pain is still afar off, but the feeling is still a kind of mourning, difficult to describe. If there is a parallel between colors and the moods of the mind; if, as Locke's blind man said, scarlet produces the same effect on the eyes as the blast of a trumpet on the ears, then this melancholy reaction may be compared with sober gray tints. Yet saddened love, love conscious of its real happiness beneath the momentary trouble, knows a wholly new luxurious blending of pain and pleasure. Jules dwelt on the tones of his wife's voice, and watched for her glances with the young passion that stirred him in the early days of their love; and memories of five perfectly happy years, Clémence's beauty, her artless love, soon effaced (for the time) the last pangs of an intolerable ache.

It was Sunday. There was no Bourse and no business. Husband and wife could spend the whole day together, and each made more progress in the other's heart than ever before, as two children in a moment's terror cling closely and tightly together, instinctively united against danger. Where two have but one life, they know such hours of perfect happiness sent by chance, flowers of a day, which have nothing to do with yesterday or to-morrow.

To Jules and Clémence it was a day of exquisite enjoyment. They might almost have felt a dim foreboding that this was to be the last day of their life as lovers. What name can be given to the mysterious impulse which hastens the traveler's steps before the storm has given warning?—it fills the dying with a glow of life and beauty a few days before the end, and sets them making the most joyous plans; it counsels the learned man to raise the flame of the midnight lamp when it burns most brightly; it wakens a mother's fears when some keen-sighted observer looks too intently at her child. We all feel this influence in great crises in our lives, yet we have neither studied it nor found a name for it. It is something more than a presentiment, something less than vision.

All went well till the next day. It was Monday, Jules Desmarets was obliged to be at the Bourse at the usual time; and, according to his custom, he asked his wife before he went if she would take the opportunity of driving with him.

"No," she said; "the weather is too bad."

And, indeed, it was pouring with rain. It was about half-past two o'clock. M. Desmarets went on the market, and thence to the Treasury. At four o'clock, when he came out, he confronted M. de Maulincour, who was waiting for him with the pertinacity bred of hate and revenge.

"I have some important information to give you, sir," he said, taking Desmarets by the arm. "Listen to me. I am an honorable man; I do not wish to send anonymous letters which would trouble your peace of mind; I prefer to speak directly. In short, you may believe that if my life were not at stake, I should never interfere between husband and wife, even if I believed that I had a right so to do."

"If you are going to say anything that concerns Madame Desmarets," answered Jules, "I beg you to be silent, sir."

"If I keep silence, sir, you may see Madame Jules in the dock beside a convict before very long. Now, am I to be silent?"

Jules' handsome face grew white, but seemingly he was calm again in a moment. He drew Maulincour under one of the porches of the temporary building then frequented by stockbrokers, and spoke, his voice unsteady with deep emotion—

"I am listening, sir, but there will be a duel to the death between us if——"

"Oh! I am quite willing," exclaimed M. de Maulincour. "I have the greatest respect for you. Do you speak of death, sir? You are not aware, I expect, that your wife probably employed somebody to poison me on Saturday evening? Yes, sir, since the day before yesterday, some extraordinary change has taken place in me. All the hairs of my head distill a fever and mortal languor that pierces through the bone; and I know perfectly well what man it was that touched my head at the dance."

M. de Maulincour told the whole story of his Platonic love for Mme. Jules and the details of the adventure with which this Scene opens. Anybody would have listened to him as attentively as Desmarets, but Mme. Jules' husband might be expected to be more astonished than anybody else in the world. And here his character showed itself—he was more surprised than overwhelmed. Thus constituted the judge, and the judge of an adored wife, in his inmost mind he assumed a judicial directness and inflexibility of mind. He was a lover still; he thought less of his own broken life than of the woman; he heard, not his own grief, but a far-off voice crying to him: "Clémence could not lie! Why should she be false to you?"

"I felt certain that in Monsieur de Funcal I recognized this Ferragus, whom the police believe to be dead," concluded M. de Maulincour, "so I put an intelligent man on his track at once. As I went home, I fortunately chanced to call to mind a Madame Meynardie, mentioned in this Ida's letter, Ida being apparently my persecutor's mistress. With this one

bit of information, my emissary speedily cleared up this ghastly adventure, for he is more skilled at finding out the truth than the police themselves."

"I am unable to thank you, sir, for your confidence," said Desmarets. "You speak of proof and witnesses; I am waiting for them. I shall not flinch from tracking down the truth in this extraordinary business; but you will permit me to suspend my judgment until the case is proved by circumstantial evidence. In any case, you shall have satisfaction, for you must understand that we both require it."

Jules went home.

"What is it?" asked his wife. "You look so pale you frighten me!"

"It is a cold day," he said, as he walked slowly away to the bedroom, where everything spoke of happiness and love, the so quiet chamber where a deadly storm was brewing.

"Have you been out to-day?" he asked, with seeming carelessness. The question, no doubt, was prompted by the last of a thousand thoughts, which had gathered unconsciously in his mind, till they took the shape of a single lucid reflection, which his jealousy brought out on the spur of the moment.

"No," she answered, and her voice sounded frank.

Even as she spoke, Jules, glancing through the dressing-room door, noticed drops of rain on the bonnet which his wife used to wear in the morning. Jules was a violent-tempered man, but he was likewise extremely sensitive; he shrank from confronting his wife with a lie. And yet those drops of water shed, as it were, a gleam of light which tortured his brain. He went downstairs to the porter's room.

"Fouquereau," he said, when he had made sure that they were alone, "three hundred francs per annum to you if you tell me the truth; if you deceive me, out you go; and if you mention my question and your answer to any one else, you will get nothing at all."

He stopped, looked steadily at the man, and then drawing him to the light of the window, he asked—

“Did your mistress go out this morning?”

“Madame went out at a quarter to three, and I think I saw her come in again half-an-hour ago.”

“Is that true, upon your honor?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You shall have the annual sum I promised you. But if you mention it, remember what I said; for if you do, you lose it all.”

Jules went back to his wife.

“Clémence,” he said, “I want to put my house accounts a bit straight, so do not be vexed if I ask you something. I have let you have forty thousand francs this year, have I not?”

“More than that,” she answered. “Forty-seven.”

“Could you tell me exactly how it was spent?”

“Why, yes. First of all, there were several outstanding bills from last year——”

“I shall find out nothing in this way,” thought Jules. “I have gone the wrong way to work.”

Just at that moment the man brought in a note. Jules opened it for the sake of appearances, but seeing the signature at the foot, he read it eagerly:

“MONSIEUR:—To set your mind and our minds at rest, I take the step of writing you, although I have not the privilege of being known to you; but my position, my age, and the fear that some misfortune may befall, compels me to beseech your forbearance in the distressing situation in which our afflicted family is placed. For some days past, M. Auguste de Maulincour has shown unmistakable symptoms of mental derangement; and we are afraid that he may disturb your happiness with the wild fancies of which he spoke to M. le Commandeur de Pamiers and to me, in the first fit of fever. We desire to give you warning of a malady which is still

curable, no doubt; and as it might have very serious consequences for the honor of the family and my grandson's future, I count upon your discretion. If M. le Commandeur or I, monsieur, had been able to make the journey to your house, we should have dispensed with a written communication; but you will comply, I do not doubt, with the request of a mother who beseeches you to burn this letter.

"Permit me to add that I am with the highest regard,

"BARONNE DE MAULINCOUR *née* DE RIEUX."

"What tortures!" exclaimed Jules.

"What can be passing in your thoughts?" asked his wife, with intense anxiety in her face.

"I have come to this!" cried Jules; "I ask myself whether you have had this note sent to me to dispel my suspicions. So judge what I am suffering," he added, tossing the letter to her.

"The unhappy man," said Mme. Jules, letting the sheet fall; "I am sorry for him, though he has given me a great deal of pain."

"You know that he spoke to me?"

"Oh! Did you go to see him when you had given your word?" was her terror-stricken answer.

"Clémence, our love is in danger; we are outside all the ordinary laws of life, so let us leave minor considerations in great perils. Now, tell me, why did you go out this morning? Women think they are privileged to tell us fibs now and again. You often amuse yourselves with preparing pleasant surprises for us, do you not? Just now you said one thing and meant another no doubt; you said a 'No' for a 'Yes.'"

He brought her bonnet out of the dressing-room.

"Look here! Without meaning to play the Bartholo here, your bonnet has betrayed you. Are these not rain-drops? Then you must have gone out and caught the drops of rain as

you looked about for a cab, or in coming in or out of the house to which you drove. Still, a woman can go out even if she has told her husband that she means to stay indoors ; there is no harm in that. There are so many reasons for changing one's mind. A whim, a woman has a right to be whimsical, is that not so ? You are not bound to be consistent with yourselves. Perhaps you forgot something ; something to be done for somebody else, or a call, or a charitable errand ? But there can be nothing to prevent a wife from telling her husband what she has done. How should one ever blush on a friend's breast ? And it is not a jealous husband who speaks, my Clémence ; it is the friend, the lover, the comrade."

He flung himself passionately at her feet.

"Speak, not to justify yourself, but to soothe an intolerable pain. I know for certain that you left the house. Well, what did you do ? Where did you go ?"

"Yes, Jules, I left the house," she said, and though her voice shook, her face was composed. "But do not ask me anything more. Wait and trust me, or you may lay up life-long regrets for yourself. Jules, my Jules, trust is love's great virtue. I confess it, I am too much troubled to answer you at this moment ; I am a woman inept at lying, and I love you, you know I love you."

"With all that shakes a man's belief and rouses his jealousy—for I am not the first in your heart, Clémence, it seems ; I am not your very self!—well, with it all, I would still rather trust you, Clémence, trust your voice and those eyes of yours. If you are deceiving me, you would deserve——"

"Oh ! a thousand deaths," she broke in.

"And I have not one thought hidden from you, while——"

"Hush," she cried, "our happiness depends upon silence between us."

"Ah ! I will know all !" he shouted, with a burst of violent anger.

As he spoke a sound reached them, a shrill-tongued woman's voice raised to a scream in the antechamber.

"I will come in, I tell you! Yes, I will come in, I want to see her, I will see her!" somebody cried.

Jules and Clémence hurried into the drawing-room, and in another moment the door was flung open. A young woman suddenly appeared with two servants behind her.

"This woman would come in, sir, in spite of us. We told her once before that madame was not at home. She said she knew quite well that madame had gone out, but she had just seen her come in. She threatens to stop at the house-door until she has spoken to madame."

"You can go," said M. Desmarests, addressing the servants.

"What do you want, mademoiselle?" he added, turning to the visitor.

The "young lady" was a feminine type known only in Paris; a type as much a product of the city as the mud or the curb-stones in the streets, or the Seine water which is filtered through half a score of great reservoirs before it sparkles clear and pure in cut-glass decanters, all its muddy sediment left behind. She is, moreover, a truly characteristic product. Pencil and pen and charcoal, painter and caricaturist and draughtsman, have caught her likeness repeatedly; yet she eludes analysis, because you can no more grasp her in all her moods than you can grasp Nature, or the fantastic city herself. Her circle has but one point of contact with vice, from which the rest of its circumference is far removed. Yet the one flaw in her character is the only trait that reveals her; all her fine qualities lie out of sight while she flaunts her ingenuous shamelessness. The plays and books that bring her before the public, with all the illusion that clings about her, give but a very inadequate idea of her; she never is, and never will be, herself except in her garret; elsewhere she is either worse or better than she really is. Give her wealth, she degenerates;

in poverty she is misconstrued. How should it be otherwise? She has so many faults and so many virtues; she lives too close to a tragic end in the river on the one hand, and a branding laugh upon the other; she is too fair and too foul; too much like a personification of that Paris which she provides with toothless old portresses, washerwomen, street-sweepers, and beggars; sometimes too with insolent countesses and admired and applauded actresses and opera singers. Twice in former times she even gave two queens, in all but name, to the Monarchy. Who could seize such a Protean woman-shape?

She is a very woman, less than a woman, and more than a woman. The painter of contemporary life can only give a few details, the general effect of so vast a subject, and some idea of its boundlessness.

This was a Paris grisette—a grisette, however, in her glory. She was the grisette that drives about in a cab; a happy, handsome, and fresh young person, but still a grisette, a grisette with claws and scissors; bold as a Spaniard, quarrelsome as an English prude instituting a suit for restitution of conjugal rights, coquettish as a great lady, and more outspoken; equal to all occasions, a typical “lioness,” issuing from her little apartment.

Many and many a time she had dreamed of that establishment with its red cotton curtains and its furniture covered with Utrecht velvet, of the tea-table and the hand-painted china tea-service and the settee; the small square of velvet-pile carpet, the alabaster timepiece and vases under glass shades, the yellow bedroom, the soft eiderdown quilt—of all the joys of a grisette’s life, in short. Now she had a servant, a superannuated member of her own profession, a veteran grisette with mustaches and good-conduct stripes. Now she went to the theatres and had as many sweetmeats as she liked; she had silk dresses and finery to soil and draggle, and all the joys of life from the point of view of the milliner’s assistant,

except a carriage of her own, a carriage being to the milliner's assistant's dreams what the marshal's baton is for the private soldier. Yes, all these things this particular grisette possessed in return for a real affection, or perhaps in spite of a real affection on her part; for others of her class will often exact as much for one hour in the day, a sort of toll carelessly paid for by a brief space in some old man's clutches, whom she utilizes as her banker.

The young person now confronting M. and Mme. Jules wore shoes, which displayed so much white stocking that they looked like an almost invisible black boundary line against the carpet. The kind of foot-gear, very neatly rendered by French comic drawings, is one of the Parisian grisette's peculiar charms of dress; but a still more unmistakable sign for observant eyes is the precision with which her gown is moulded to her figure, which is very clearly outlined. Moreover, the visitor was "turned out" in a green dress, to use the picturesque expression coined by the French soldier, a dress with a chemisette, which revealed a fine figure, fully displayed, for her Ternaux shawl would have slipped down to the floor if she had not held the two loosely knotted ends in her grasp. She had a delicate face, a white skin and color in her cheeks, sparkling gray eyes, a very prominent rounded forehead, and carefully waved hair, which escaped from under a little bonnet, and fell in large curls about her neck.

"My name is Ida, sir. And if that is Madame Jules whom I have the privilege of addressing, I have come to tell her all that I have against her on my mind. It is a shame, when she has made her bargain, and has such furniture as you have here, to try to take away the man to whom a poor girl is as good as married, and him talking of making it all right by marrying me at the registry office. There's quite plenty nice young men in the world—isn't there, sir?—for her to fancy without her coming and taking a man well on in years away from me when I am happy with him. Yah! I haven't a fine house, I

haven't, I have only my love! I *distest* your fine-looking men and money; I am all heart and——"

Mme. Jules turned to her husband—

"You will permit me, sir, to hear no more of this," said she, and went back to her room.

"If the lady is living with you, I have made a hash of it, so far as I can see; but so much the worse," continued Ida. "What business has she to come and see Monsieur Ferragus every day?"

"You are mistaken, mademoiselle," said Jules, in dull amazement; "my wife could not possibly——"

"Oh! so you are married, are you, the two of you?" said the grisette, evidently rather surprised. "Then it's far worse, sir, is it not, when a woman has a lawful husband of her own to have anything to do with a man like Henri——"

"But what Henri?" said Jules, taking Ida aside into another room lest his wife should overhear anything further.

"Well, then, Monsieur Ferragus."

"But he is dead," protested Jules.

"What stuff! I went to Franconi's yesterday evening, and he brought me home again, as he ought to do. Your lady too can give you news of him. Didn't she go to see him at three o'clock? That she did, I know, for I was waiting for her in the street; being as a very nice man, Monsieur Justin—perhaps you know him? a little old fogey that wears stays and has seals on his watchchain—it was he that told me that I had a Madame Jules for my rival. That name, sir, is well known among fancy names; asking your pardon, since it's your own, but Madame Jules might be a duchess at Court, Henri is so rich he can afford all his whims. It is my business to look after my own, as I have a right to do; for I love Henri, I do. He was my first fancy, and my love and the rest of my life is at stake. I am afraid of nothing, sir; I am honest, and I never told a lie yet, nor took a thing belonging to anybody whatever. If I had an empress for my rival I

"YOU ARE MISTAKEN, MADEMOISELLE, MY WIFE
COULD NOT POSSIBLY—"



should go right straight to her, and if she took my husband that is to be from me, I feel that I could kill her, was she never so much an empress, for one fine woman is as good as another, sir——”

“That will do, that will do!” interrupted Jules. “Where do you live?”

“Number 14 Rue de la Corderie du Temple, sir. Ida Gruget, corset-maker, at your service, sir; for we make a good many corsets for gentlemen.”

“And this man Ferragus, as you call him, where does he live?”

“Why, sir” (tightening her lips), “in the first place, he is not just ‘a man’—he is a gentleman, and better off than you are, maybe. But what makes you ask me for his address, when your wife knows where he lives? He told me I was not to give it to nobody. Am I bound to give you an answer? I am not in the police court nor the confessional, the Lord be thanked, and I am not beholden to any one.”

“And how if I offer you twenty, thirty, forty thousand francs to tell me his address?”

“Oh, not quite, my little dear; it’s no go,” said she, with a gesture learned in the streets, as accompaniment to her singular answer. “No amount of money would get that out of me. I have the honor to wish you good-evening. Which way do you get out of this?”

Jules allowed her to go. He was stricken to earth. The whole world seemed to be crumbling away under him, the sky above had fallen with a crash.

“Dinner is ready, sir,” said the footman.

For fifteen minutes the footman and Desmarets’ manservant waited in the dining-room, but no one appeared. The maid came in to say that “the mistress would not take dinner.”

“Why, what is the matter, Joséphine?” asked the footman.

“I don’t know. The mistress is crying, and she is going to bed. The master has a fancy somewhere else, I expect,

and it has been found out at an awkward time ; do you understand ? I would not answer for the mistress' life. Men are all so clumsy, always making scenes without thinking in the least."

"Not a bit of it," said the man, lowering his voice ; "on the contrary, it is the mistress who—in short, you understand. What time could the master have for gadding about, when he hasn't spent a night out these five years, and goes down to his office at ten o'clock, and only comes up to lunch at twelve ? In fact, his life is open and regular, while the mistress goes off pretty nearly every day at three o'clock, no one knows where."

"So does the master," said the maid, taking her mistress' part.

"But he goes to the Bourse, the master does. This is the third time I have told him that dinner is ready," he added, after a pause ; "you might as well talk to a *statute*."

Jules came in.

"Where is your mistress ?" asked he.

"Madame has gone to bed, she has a sick headache," said the maid, assuming an important air.

"You can take the dinner away," said Jules, with much cool self-possession. "I shall keep madame company." And he went to his wife. She was crying, and stifling her sobs with her handkerchief.

"Why do you cry ?" said Jules, using the formal *vous*. "You have no violence, no reproaches, to expect from me. Why should I avenge myself ? If you have not been faithful to my love, it is because you were not worthy of it——"

"Not worthy !"

The words repeated amid her sobs, and the tone in which they were spoken, would have softened any man but Jules.

"To kill you, a man must love more, perhaps, than I," he resumed ; "but I have not the heart to do it, I would sooner make away with myself and leave you to your—your happiness—and to—whom——?"

He broke off.

"Make away with yourself!" cried Clémence. She flung herself at Jules' feet and clung about them; but he tried to shake her off, and dragged her to the bed.

"Leave me alone," said he.

"No, no, Jules! If you love me no longer, I shall die. Do you wish to know all?"

"Yes." He took her, held her forcibly in his grasp, sat down on the bedside, and held her between his knees; then he gazed dry-eyed at the fair face, now red as fire and seamed with tear-stains. "Now, tell me," he said for the second time.

Clémence began to sob afresh.

"I cannot. It is a secret of life and death. If I told you, I—— No, I *cannot*. Have pity, Jules!"

"You are deceiving me still," he said, but he replaced the formal *vous* by *tu* (you by thou).

"Ah!" she cried, at this sign of relenting. "Yes, Jules, you may believe that I am deceiving you, now you shall know everything very soon."

"But this Ferragus, this convict that you go to see, this man enriched by crime. if he is not your lover, if you are not his——"

"Oh, Jules!"

"Well, is he your unknown benefactor, the man to whom we owe our success, as people have said before this?"

"Who said so!"

"A man whom I killed in a duel."

"Oh, God! one man dead already."

"If he is not your protector, if he does not give you money, and you take money to him, is he your brother?"

"Well," she said, "and if he were?"

M. Desmarests folded his arms.

"Why should this have been kept from my knowledge?" returned he. "Did you both deceive me—you and your

mother? And do people go to see their brothers every day, or nearly every day, eh?"

But his wife fell swooning at his feet.

He pulled the bell-rope, summoned Joséphine, and laid Clémence on the bed.

"She is dead," he thought, "and how if I am wrong?"

"This will kill me," murmured Mme. Jules, as she came to herself.

"Joséphine," exclaimed M. Desmarets, "go for Monsieur Desplein; and then go to my brother's house and ask him to come as soon as possible."

"Why your brother?" asked Clémence.

But Jules had already left the room.

For the first time in five years Mme. Jules slept alone in her bed, and was obliged to allow a doctor to enter the sanctuary, two troubles that she felt keenly.

Desplein found Mme. Jules very ill; never had violent emotion been worse timed. He postponed his decision on the case till the morrow, and left diverse prescriptions which were not carried out, all physical suffering was forgotten in heart distress. Daylight was at hand, and still Clémence lay awake. Her thoughts were busy with the murmur of conversation, which lasted for several hours, between the others, but no single word reached her through the thickness of the walls to give a clue to the meaning of the prolonged conference. M. Desmarets, the notary, went at length; and then, in the stillness of the night, with a strange stimulation of the senses that comes with passion, Clémence could hear the squeaking of a pen and the unconscious movements made by some one busily writing. Those who are accustomed to sit up through the night, and have noticed the effect of deep silence on the laws of acoustics, know that a faint sound at intervals is easily heard, when a continuous and even murmur is scarcely distinguishable.

Clémence rose, anxious and trembling. She forgot her condition, forgot that she was damp with perspiration, and, barefooted and without a dressing-gown, went across and opened the door. Luckily it turned noiselessly on its hinges. She saw her husband, pen in hand, sitting fast asleep in his easy-chair. The candles were burning low in the sockets. She crept forward, and on an envelope that lay sealed already she saw the words: "My Will."

She knelt down, as if at a graveside, and kissed her husband's hand. He woke at once.

"Jules, dear, even criminals condemned to death are given a few days' respite," she said, looking at him with eyes shining with love and fever. "Your innocent wife asks for two days—only two days. Leave me, then, free for two days, and—wait. After that I shall die happy; at any rate, you will be sorry."

"You shall have the delay, Clémence."

And while she kissed her husband's hands in a pathetic outpouring of her heart, Jules, fascinated by that cry of innocence, took her in his arms and kissed her on the forehead, utterly ashamed that he should still submit to the power of that noble beauty.

Next morning, after a few hours of sleep, Jules went to his wife's room, mechanically obedient to his custom of never leaving home without first seeing her. Clémence was asleep. A ray of light from a chink in the highest window fell on the face of a woman worn out with grief. Sorrow had left traces on her brow already, and faded the fresh red of her lips. A lover's eyes could not mistake the significance of the dark marbled streaks and the pallor of illness, which took the place of the even color in her cheeks and the white velvet of her skin, the transparent surface over which all the feelings that stirred that fair soul so unconsciously flitted.

"She is not well," thought Jules. "Poor Clémence, may God protect us!"

He kissed her very gently on the forehead; she awoke, looked into her husband's face, and understood. She could not speak, but she took his hand, and her eyes grew soft with tears.

"I am innocent," she said, finishing her dream.

"You will not go out to-day, will you?" said Jules.

"No; I feel too weak to get up."

"If you change your mind, wait till I come home," said Jules, and he went down to the porter's lodge.

"Fouquereau, you must keep a strict watch to-day," he said. "I wish to know every one who comes in or out."

With that, Jules sprang into a cab, bade the man drive to the Hôtel de Maulincour, and asked for the baron.

"Monsieur is ill," was the reply.

Jules insisted, and sent in his name. If he could not see M. de Maulincour, he would see the vidame or the dowager. He waited for some time in the old baroness' drawing-room; she came at last, however, to say that her grandson was far too ill to see him.

"I know the nature of his illness, madame," said Jules, "from the letter which you did me the honor to send, and I entreat you to believe——"

"A letter, monsieur? A letter that I sent to you?" broke in the baroness. "I have not written a word. And what am I supposed to say, monsieur, in this letter?"

"Madame, as I meant to call on Monsieur de Maulincour this very day, and to return the note to you, I thought I need not destroy it in spite of the request at the end. Here it is."

The dowager rang for her double-strength spectacles, and glanced down the sheet with every sign of the greatest astonishment.

"The handwriting is so exactly like mine, monsieur, that if we were not speaking of a quite recent event, I should be deceived by it myself. My grandson certainly is ill, monsieur, but his mind has not been affected the least bit in the

world. We are puppets in the hands of wicked people ; still, I cannot guess the object of this piece of impertinence. You shall see my grandson, monsieur, and you will admit that he is perfectly sane."

She rang the bell again to ask if it were possible for the baron to receive a visit from M. Desmarets. The footman brought an answer in the affirmative. Jules went up to Auguste de Maulincour's room, and found that young officer seated in an armchair by the fireside. He was too weak to rise, and greeted his visitor with a melancholy inclination of the head. The Vidame de Pamiers was keeping him company.

"Monsieur le Baron," began Jules, "I have something to say of so private a nature that I should wish to speak with you alone."

"Monsieur," said Auguste, "Monsieur le Commandeur knows all about this affair ; you need not fear to speak before him."

"Monsieur le Baron, you have disturbed and almost destroyed my happiness ; and you had no right to do so. Until we know which of us must ask or give satisfaction to the other, you are bound to give me your assistance in the dark ways to which you have suddenly brought me. So I have come to inquire the present address of this mysterious being who exercises such an unlucky influence on our lives, and seems to have some supernatural power at his orders. I received this letter yesterday, just as I came in after hearing your account of yourself."

Jules handed the forged letter.

"This Ferragus or Bourignard or Monsieur de Funcal is a fiend incarnate !" shouted Maulincour. "In what hideous labyrinth have I set foot ? Whither am I going ? I was wrong, monsieur," he added, looking full at Jules, "but death surely is the greatest expiation of all, and I am dying. So you can ask me anything you wish ; I am at your service."

"You should know where this strange man lives; I absolutely must get to the bottom of this mystery, if it costs me all that I have; and with such a cruelly ingenious enemy every moment is precious."

"Justin will tell us all about it directly," replied the baron. The vidame fidgeted upon his chair. Auguste rang the bell.

"Justin is not in the house," exclaimed the vidame in a hasty fashion, which said a good deal more than the words.

"Well," Auguste said quickly, "and if he is not, our servants here know where he is. A man on horseback shall go at once to find him. Your servant is in Paris, is he not? They will find him somewhere."

The old Vidame de Pamiers was visibly troubled.

"Justin will not come, dear fellow," he said. "I wanted to keep the accident from your knowledge, but——"

"Is he dead?" exclaimed M. de Maulincour. "And when? and how?"

"It happened yesterday night. He went out to supper with some old friends, and got drunk, no doubt; his friends, being also the worse for wine, must have left him to lie in the street; a heavy carriage drove right over him——"

"The convict did not fail that time; he killed his man at the first attempt," said Auguste. "He was not so lucky with me; he had to try four times."

Jules grew moody and thoughtful.

"So I shall find out nothing, it seems," he exclaimed, after a long pause. "Perhaps your man was rightly served; he went beyond your orders when he slandered Madame Desmarests to one 'Ida,' to stir up the girl's jealousy and let her loose upon us."

"Ah, monsieur, in my fury I gave over Madame Jules to him."

"Sir!" exclaimed Mme. Jules' husband, stung to the quick; but Maulincour silenced him with a wave of the hand.

"Oh! now I am prepared for all that may happen. What is done is done, and you will do no better; nor can you say anything that my own conscience has not told me already. I am expecting the most famous specialist in toxicology to learn my fate. If the pain is likely to be intolerable, I have made up my mind; I shall blow my brains out."

"You are talking like a boy," cried the old vidame, aghast at the baron's coolness. "Your grandmother would die of grief!"

"And so, monsieur, there is no way of finding out in what part of Paris this extraordinary man lives?" asked Monsieur Jules.

"I think, monsieur, that I heard this poor Justin say that Monsieur de Funcal was to be found at the Portuguese or else the Brazilian embassy," said the vidame. "Monsieur de Funcal is of a good family; he belongs to both countries. As for the convict, he is dead and buried. Your persecutor, whoever he may be, is so powerful, it seems to me, that you had better accept him in his new metamorphosis until you are in a position to overwhelm him with confusion and crush him; but set about it prudently, my dear sir. If Monsieur de Maulincour had taken my advice, nothing of all this would have happened."

Jules withdrew, coolly but politely. He was at his wits' end to find Ferragus. As he came in, the porter came out to inform him that madame had gone out to put a letter into the box opposite the Rue de Ménars. Jules felt humiliated by the profound intelligence with which the man aided and abetted his scheme, and by the very skill with which he found means to serve him. The zeal and peculiar ingenuity which inferiors will show to compromise their betters, when their betters compromise themselves, were well known to Jules, and he appreciated the danger of having such accomplices in any affair whatsoever; but he had forgotten his personal dignity till he suddenly saw how far he had fallen. What a triumph

for a serf, unable to rise to his master, to bring that master down to his own level !

Jules was stern and abrupt with the man. Another blunder. But he was so wretched ! His life, till then so straight and clean, had grown crooked ; and now there was nothing for it but to use craft and lies. And Clémence, too, was using lies and craft with him. It was a sickening moment. Lost in depths of bitter thought, he stood forgetful of himself and motionless on the door-step. Sometimes he gave way to despair which counseled flight ; he would leave France and carry with him his love and all the illusions of unproved guilt ; and then again, never doubting but that Clémence's letter was addressed to Ferragus, he cast about for ways of intercepting the reply sent by that mysterious being. Again, examining into his singular success since his marriage, he asked himself whether that slander which he had avenged was not after all a truth. At length, returning to Ferragus' answer, he reasoned with himself on this wise :

“ But will this Ferragus, so profoundly astute as he is, so consequent in the least things that he does ; this man who sees, and foresees, and calculates, and even guesses our thoughts, will he send an answer ? Is he not sure to employ some means in keeping with his power ? Can he not send a reply by some ingenious scoundrel, or, more likely still, in a jewel case brought by some unsuspecting, honest creature, or in a parcel with a pair of shoes which some working-girl, in all innocence, brings home for my wife ? Suppose that there should be an understanding between him and Clémence ? ”

He could trust nothing and nobody. He made a hurried survey of the boundless field, the shoreless sea of conjecture ; and after drifting hither and thither, and in every possible direction, it occurred to him that he was stronger in his own house than anywhere else ; so he resolved to stay at home and watch like an ant-lion at the bottom of its funnel in the sand.

"Fouquereau," he said, "if any one asks for me, I am not at home. But if any one wishes to speak with madame, or brings anything for her, ring twice. And you must let me see every letter left here, no matter to whom it is addressed. And so," he thought within himself, as he went into his office on the entresol, "and so I shall outwit Master Ferragus. And if his messenger is cunning enough to ask for me, so as to find out whether madame is alone, at any rate I shall not be gulled like a fool."

His office windows looked into the street. As he stood with his face pressed against the panes, jealousy inspired him with a final stratagem. He determined to send his head-clerk to the Bourse in his carriage; the clerk should take a letter to a friend of his, another stockbroker, to whom he would explain his business transactions—he would beg his friend to take his place. His most difficult business he put off till the morrow, regardless of the rise and fall of stocks, and all the funds of Europe. Fair prerogative of love! Love eclipses all things else. The rest of the world fades away before it; and altar, throne, and government securities are as though they were not. At half-past three o'clock, just when the Bourse is all agog with rates and premiums, rises and falls, current accounts, and the rest of it, Jules looked up and saw Fouquereau with a beaming countenance.

"An old woman has just been here, sir; she is as sharp as they make them. Oh! she is an artful one, I can tell you. She asked for you, and seemed put out to find you were not at home; then she gave me this letter here for madame."

Jules broke the seal with fevered anguish, but he dropped exhausted into his chair. The letter was a string of meaningless words, and quite unintelligible without a key. It was written in cipher.

"You can go, Fouquereau."

The man went.

"This mystery is deeper than the unplumbed sea. Oh,

this is love beyond a doubt. Love, and love only, could be as sagacious, as ingenious as the writer of this letter. Oh, God ! I will kill Clémence."

Even at that moment a bright idea burst upon his brain, and struck him so forcibly, that it seemed almost like the breaking out of light. In the old days of poverty and hard work before his marriage, Jules had made a real friend. The excessive delicacy with which Jules spared the susceptibilities of a poor and shy comrade, the respect that he paid his friend, the tactful ingenuity with which he made that friend accept a share of his good fortune without a blush—all these things had increased their friendship since those days. In spite of Desmaret's prosperity, Jacquet was faithful to him.

Jacquet, an honest man, and a toiler of austere life, had slowly made his way in that department which of all others employs most rascality and most honesty. He was in the Foreign Office ; the most delicate part of its archives was in his charge. He was a kind of departmental glow-worm, shedding light during his working hours on secret correspondence, deciphering and classifying dispatches. Rather above the rank and file of the middle-classes, he held the highest (subaltern) post at the Foreign Office, and lived unrecognized ; rejoicing in an obscurity which put him beyond reverses of fortune, and content to pay his debt to his fatherland in small coin. A born assistant-registrar, he enjoyed the respect that was due to him, in newspaper language. And, as an unknown patriot in a Government Department, he resigned himself to groan, by his fireside, over the aberrations of the Government that he served. His position, thanks to Jules, had been improved by a suitable marriage. In his own home, Jacquet was a debonair king, a "man with an umbrella," as they say, who hired a carriage for his wife which he never entered himself ; and as a final touch to this portrait of an unconscious philosopher, it should be added that he had never yet suspected, and never would suspect, how much he might make

out of his position, with a stockbroker for his intimate friend, and a knowledge of State secrets. A hero after the manner of that unknown private soldier who died to save Napoleon with a cry of "Who goes there?" he was faithful to his Department.

In another ten minutes Jules stood in Jacquet's private office. His friend brought forward a chair, laid his green silk eye-shade down methodically upon the table, rubbed his hands, took out his snuff-box, rose to his feet, threw out his chest with a crack of the shoulder-blades, and said—

"What chance brings you here, Mo'sieur Desmarets? What do you want with me?"

"I want you to find out a secret for me, Jacquet; it is a matter of life and death."

"It is not about politics?"

"You are not the man I should come to if I wanted to know anything of that kind," said Jules. "No, it is a private affair, and I must ask you to keep it as secret as possible."

"Claude-Joseph Jacquet, professional mute. Why, don't you know me?" laughed he. "My line of business is discretion."

Jules put the letter before him.

"This is addressed to my wife; I must have it read to me," he said.

"The devil! the devil! a bad business," said Jacquet, scrutinizing the document as a money-lender examines a negotiable bill. "Aha! a stencil cipher. Wait!"

He left Jules alone in the office, but came back pretty soon.

"Tomfoolery, my friend. It is written with an old stencil cipher which the Portuguese ambassador used in Monsieur de Choiseul's time after the expulsion of the jesuits. Stay, look here."

Jacquet took up a sheet of paper with holes cut in it at regular intervals; it looked rather like the lace paper which confectioners put over their sugar-plums. When this was set

over the sheet below, Jules could easily make sense of the words left uncovered :

“MY DEAR CLÉMENCE :—Do not trouble yourself any more ; no one shall trouble our happiness again, and your husband will put his suspicions aside. I cannot go to see you. However ill you may be, you must gather up your courage to come to me ; summon up your strength, love will give it to you. I have been through a most cruel operation for your sake, and I cannot stir out of bed. Moxas were applied yesterday evening to the nape of the neck and across the shoulders ; it was necessary to cauterize pretty deeply. Do you understand ? But I thought of you, and found the pain not intolerable. I have left the sheltering roof of the Embassy to baffle Maulincour, who shall not persecute us much longer ; and here I am safe from all search at Number 12 Rue des Enfants-Rouges, with an old woman, one Mme. Étienne Gruget, mother of that Ida, who shall shortly pay dear for her silly prank. Come to-morrow at nine o'clock. My room can only be reached by an inner staircase. Ask for M. Camuset. Adieu till to-morrow. I kiss thy forehead, my darling.”

Jacquet gazed at Jules with a kind of shocked expression with a very real sympathy in it, and brought out his favorite invocation : “The devil ! the devil !” in two distinct intonations.

“It seems clear to you, doesn't it ?” said Jules. “Well, and yet, in the bottom of my heart a voice pleads for my wife, and that voice rises above all the pangs of jealousy. I shall endure the most horrid torture until to-morrow ; but at last, to-morrow between nine and ten, I shall know all. I shall either be wretched or happy for life. Think of me, Jacquet.”

“I will be at your house at eight o'clock. We will go yonder together. I will wait outside in the street for you, if you like. There may be risks to run ; you ought to have

some one you can trust within call, a sure hand that can take a hint. Count upon me."

"Even to help me to kill a man?"

"The devil! the devil!" Jacquet said quickly, repeating, so to speak, the same musical note. "I have two children and a wife——"

Jules squeezed Claude Jacquet's hand and went out. But he came back in haste.

"I am forgetting the letter," said he. "And that is not all; it must be sealed again."

"The devil! the devil! you opened it without taking an impression; but, luckily, the edge of the fracture is pretty clean. There, let me have it, I will give it you back again *secundum scripturam* (according to the Scriptures)."

"When?"

"By half-past five——"

"If I am not in, simply give it to the porter, and tell him to send it up to madame."

"Do you want me to-morrow?"

"No. Farewell."

Jules soon reached the Place de la Rotonde du Temple, dismissed his cabriolet, and walked down to the Rue des Enfants-Rouges, to take a look at Mme. Étienne Gruget's abode. The mystery on which so many lives hung was to be cleared up there. Ferragus was there, and Ferragus held all the ends of the threads in this obscure business. Was not the connection between Mme. Jules, her husband, and this man the Gordian knot of a tragedy stained even now with blood? Nor should the blade be wanting to cut asunder the tightest of all bonds.

The house belonged to the class commonly known as *cabajoutis*—an expressive name given by working people in Paris to patchwork buildings, as they may be called. Several houses, originally separate, have some time been run into one, according to the fancy of the various proprietors who successively enlarged them; or they were begun and left unfinished

for a time, and afterward resumed and completed. Unlucky dwellings are they that have passed, like sundry nations, under the rule of several dynasties of capricious rulers. The various stories and the windows do not belong to each other, to borrow one of the most picturesque of painter's words; every detail, even the decorations outside, clashes with the rest of the building. The *cabajoutis* is to Parisian street architecture what the *cappharnaüm*, or lumber-room, is to the house—a regular rubbish-heap, where the most unlikely things are shot down together pell-mell.

“Mme. Étienne?” Jules asked of the portress.

That functionary was installed in the great centre doorway in a sort of hencoop, a little wooden house on wheels, not unlike the cabins which the police authorities put up at every cabstand.

“Eh?” said the portress, laying down the stocking which she was knitting. The living accessories which contribute to the general effect of any portion of the great monster, Paris, fit in, as a rule, remarkably well with the character of their surroundings. The porter, janitor, concierge, Swiss, or whatever you may choose to call this indispensable muscle in the monster's economy, is always in keeping with the quarter of which he is an integral part; very often he is the Quarter incarnate. The concierge of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, an idle being embroidered at every seam, speculates in stocks and shares; in the Chaussée d'Antin, the porter is a comfortable personage; in the neighborhood of the Bourse, he reads the newspaper; in the Faubourg Montmartre, he carries on some industry or other. In low neighborhoods the portress is a worn-out prostitute; in the Marais she keeps herself respectable, she is apt to be peevish and cross-grained, she has her “ways.”

At sight of Jules, the portress of the Rue des Enfants-Rouges stirred up the dying embers of block fuel in her foot-warmer, taking a knife for the purpose. Then she said:

"You want Madame Étienne ; do you mean Madame Étienne Gruget ? "

"Yes," said Jules Desmarests, with a touch of vexation.

"She that works at trimmings ? "

"Yes."

"Very well, sir," and, emerging from her cage, she laid a hand on Jules' arm and drew him to the farther end of a long narrow passage, vaulted like a cellar ; "you go up the second staircase opposite, just across the yard. Do you see the windows with the wallflowers ? That's where Madame Étienne lives."

"Thank you, madame. Is she alone, do you think ? "

"Why shouldn't she be alone when she is a lone woman ? "

Jules sprang noiselessly up a very dark staircase, every step incrustured with dried lumps of mud deposited by the lodgers' boots. He found three doors on the second floor, but no sign of wallflowers. Luckily for him, some words were written in chalk on the grimmest and greasiest of the three—*Ida will be back at nine o'clock to-night.*

"Here it is," said Jules to himself.

He tugged at an old blackened bell-pull, with a fawn's foot attached, and heard the smothered tinkle of a little cracked bell, and the yapping of an asthmatic little dog. He could tell by the sound that the bell made inside that the room was so lumbered up with things that there was no room for an echo—a characteristic trait of workmen's lodgings and little households generally, where there is neither space nor air. Jules looked about involuntarily for the wallflowers, and found them at last on the window-sill, between two pestiferous sinks. Here were flowers, a garden two feet long and six inches wide, and a sprouting grain of wheat—all life condensed into that narrow space, and not one of life's miseries lacking ! A ray of sunlight shone down, as if in pity on the sickly blossoms and the superb green column of wheat-stalk, bringing out the indescribable color peculiar to Paris slums ; dust, grease, and

inconceivable filth incrusting and corroded the rubbed, discolored damp walls, the worm-eaten balusters, the gaping window-sashes, the doors that once had been painted red. In another moment he heard an old woman's cough and the sound of heavy feet dragging painfully along in list slippers. This must be Ida Gruget's mother. She opened the door, came out upon the landing, raised her face to his, and said—

“Ah! it's M'sieur Bocquillon! Why, no it isn't. My word! how like you are to M'sieur Bocquillon! You are a brother of his perhaps? What can I do for you, sir? Just step inside.”

Jules followed her into the first room, and caught a general impression of bird-cages, pots and pans, stoves, furniture, little earthenware dishes full of broken meat, or milk for the dog and the cats; a wooden clock-case, blankets, Eisen's engravings, and a heap of old ironware piled up with the most curiously grotesque effect. It was a genuine Parisian *capharnaüm*; nothing was lacking, not even a few odd numbers of the “*Constitutionnel*.”

“Just come in here and warm yourself,” said the Widow Gruget, but prudence prevailed. Jules was afraid that Ferragus might overhear, and wondered whether the bargain which he proposed to make had not better be concluded in the outer room; just then, however, a hen came cackling down a staircase and cut short his inward conference. He made up his mind and followed Ida's mother into the next room, where a fire was burning. A wheezy little pug-dog, a dumb spectator, followed them, and scrambled up on an old stool. Mme. Gruget's request to come in and get warm was prompted by the very coxcombry of poverty on the brink of destitution. Her stock-pot completely hid a couple of smouldering sticks which ostentatiously shunned each other. A skimmer lay on the floor, with the handle among the ashes. On the wooden ledge above the fireplace, amid a litter of wools, cotton-reels, and odds and ends, needed for the manufacture of trimmings, stood a little waxen crucifix under a

shade made of pieces of glass joined together with strips of bluish paper. Jules looked round at the furniture with a curiosity in which self-interest was blended, and in spite of himself he showed his secret satisfaction.

"Well, sir, do you think you can buy any of my furniture?" inquired the widow, sitting down in a yellow cane-seated armchair, her headquarters apparently; for it contained her pocket-handkerchief, her snuff-box, some half-peeled vegetables, her spectacles, an almanack, a length of galoon on which she was at work, a pack of greasy playing-cards, and a couple of novels. All this sounded hollow. The piece of furniture on which the widow was "descending the river of life" was something like the comprehensive bag which women take on a journey, a sort of house in miniature, containing everything from the husband's portrait to the drop of balm tea in case she feels faint, from the sugar-plums for the little ones to English court-plaster for cut fingers.

Jules made a careful survey of it all. He looked very closely at Mme. Gruget herself, with her gray eyes, denuded of lashes and eyebrows, at her toothless mouth, at the dark shades in her wrinkles, at her rusty net cap, with its yet more rusty frill, at her tattered cotton petticoats, her worn slippers, and charred foot-warmer, and then at the table covered with crockery, silks, and patterns of work in worsted and cotton, with the neck of a wine-bottle rising out of the middle of the litter, and said within himself: "This woman has some passion, some failing that she keeps quiet; she is in my power." Aloud he said with a significant gesture: "I have come to order some galoon of you, madame;" then lowered his voice to add: "I know that you have a lodger here, a man that goes by the name of Camuset."

The old woman looked up at once, but there was not a sign of surprise in her countenance.

"Look here, can he overhear us? There is a fortune involved for you, mind you."

"You can speak, sir, there is nothing to be afraid of; there is nobody here. There is somebody upstairs, but it is quite impossible that he should hear you."

"Ah! cunning old thing! She can give you a Norman's answer," thought Jules. "We may come to terms. You need not trouble yourself to tell a lie, madame. To begin with, bear in mind that I mean no harm whatever to you, nor your invalid lodger with his blisters, nor to your daughter Ida the stay-maker, Ferragus' sweetheart. You see, I know all about it. Never mind, I have nothing to do with the police, and I want nothing that is likely to hurt your conscience."

"A young lady will come here to-morrow between nine and ten to have some talk with your daughter's sweetheart. I want to be somewhere near, so that I can hear and see everything without being heard or seen. You must arrange this for me, and I will give you two thousand francs down, and an annuity of six hundred francs. My notary shall draw up the agreement this evening in your presence, and I will give the money into his hands to pay over to you to-morrow after this meeting at which I wish to be present, when I shall have proof of your good faith."

"It will not do any harm to my daughter, will it, my dear gentleman?" she returned, on the watch like a suspicious cat.

"None whatever, madame. But, at the same time, your daughter is behaving very badly to you, it seems to me. When a man as rich and powerful as Ferragus is fond of her, it ought to be easy to make you more comfortable than you appear to be."

"Ah, my dear gentleman, not so much as a miserable ticket for the Ambigu or the Gaîté, where she can go whenever she likes. It is shameful. And I that sold my silver spoons, and am eating now off German silver in my old age, all to apprentice that girl, and give her a business where she could coin gold if she chose. For as to that, she takes after her mother; she is as neat-fingered as a fairy, it must be said in justice to

her. At any rate, she might as well hand over her old silk dresses to me, so fond as I am of wearing silk ; but no, sir. She goes to the *Cadran Bleu*, to dine at fifty francs a head, and rolls in her carriage like a princess, and doesn't care a rap for her mother. God Almighty ! we bring these scatter-brained girls into the world, and it is not the best that could be said for us. A mother, sir, and a good mother, too, for I have hidden her giddiness, and cosseted her to that degree that I took the bread out of my mouth to stuff her with all that I had ! Well, and that is not enough, but she must come and coax you, and then wish you 'Good-day, mother !' That is the way they do their duty to them that brought them into the world ! Just let them go their ways. But she will have children some day or other, and then she will know what it is for herself ; bad bargains they are, but one loves them, all the same."

"What, does she do nothing for you?"

"Nothing? Oh, no, sir, I don't say that. If she did nothing at all for me, it would be rather too bad. She pays the rent, and she gives me firewood and thirty-six francs a month. But is it right, sir, that I should have to go on working at my age ; I am fifty-two, and my eyes are weak of an evening? And what is more, why won't she have me with her? If she is ashamed of me, she may as well say so at once. You had need to bury yourself, and that is the truth, for these beastly children that forget all about you before they have so much as shut the door."

She drew her handkerchief from her pocket, and a lottery ticket fell out, but she picked it up in a moment.

"Hi? that is the tax-collector's receipt."

Jules suddenly guessed the reason of the prudent parsimony of which the mother complained, and felt the more sure that the Widow Gruget would agree to his proposal.

"Very well, madame," he said, "in that case you will accept my offer."

"Two thousand francs down, did you say, sir? and six hundred francs a year?"

"I have changed my mind, madame. I will promise you only three hundred francs of annuity. The arrangement suits me better. But I will pay you five thousand francs down. You would rather have it so, would you not?"

"Lord, yes, sir."

"You will be more comfortable, you can go to the Ambigu Comique, or Franconi's, or anywhere else, and go comfortably in a hackney-coach."

"Oh, I do not care about Franconi's at all, being as you don't hear talk there. And if I agree to take the money, sir, it is because it will be a fine thing for my child. And I shall not be living on her. Poor little thing, after all, I don't grudge her such pleasure as she gets. Young things must have amusement, sir. And so, if you will assure me that I shall be doing nobody any harm——"

"Nobody," repeated Jules. "But see now, how are you going to set about it?"

"Oh, well, sir, if Monsieur Ferragus has just a little drink of poppy water to-night, he will sleep sound, the dear man! And much he stands in need of sleep, in such pain as he is, for he suffers so that it makes you sorry to see it. And by-the-by, just tell me what sort of a notion it is for a healthy man to have his back burnt to cure the neuralgia that does not trouble him once in two years? But to go back to our business, sir. My neighbor that lives just above has left her key with me; her room is next door to Monsieur Ferragus' bedroom. She has gone to the country for ten days. So if you have a hole made to-night in the partition wall, you can look in and hear at your ease. There is a locksmith, a great friend of mine, a very nice man, that talks like an angel; he will do that for me, and nobody any the wiser."

"Here are a hundred francs for him. You must come this evening to Monsieur Desmaret's; he is a notary; here is his

address. The paper will be ready at nine o'clock, but—mum!”

“Right; mum as you say. Good-day, sir.”

Jules went home again, almost soothed by the certainty of knowing everything to-morrow. He found the letter, sealed flawlessly again, in the porter's room.

“How are you?” he asked his wife, in spite of the coolness between them, so difficult is it to break from the old habits of affection.

“Rather better, Jules,” she answered in winning tones; “will you dine here with me?”

“Yes. Stay, here is something that Fouquereau gave me for you,” and he handed her the letter. At the sight of it Clémence's white face flushed a deep red; the sudden crimson sent an intolerable pang through her husband.

“Is that joy?” laughed he, “or relief from suspense?”

“Oh! many things,” she said, as she looked at the seal.

“I will leave you, madame.”

He went down to his office and wrote to his brother about the annuity for the Widow Gruget. When he came back again dinner was ready on a little table by Clémence's bedside, and Joséphine waited upon them.

“If I were not lying in bed, what a pleasure it would be to me to serve you!” she said, when Joséphine had gone. “Oh, and even on my knees,” she went on, passing her white fingers through Jules' hair. “Dear noble heart! you were very merciful and good to me just now. You have done me more good by your trust in me than all the doctors in the world could do with their prescriptions. Your woman's delicacy—for you can love as a woman can—shed balm in my soul; I feel almost well again. There is a truce. Jules, come closer, let me kiss you.”

Jules could not forego the joy of Clémence's kiss, and yet it was not without something like remorse in his heart. He felt small before this woman, in whose innocence he was always

tempted to believe. There was a sort of sorrowful gladness about Clémence. A chastened hope shone through the troubled expression of her face. They seemed both alike unhappy that the deceit must be kept up; another kiss, and they must tell each other all; they could endure their pain no longer.

"To-morrow evening, Clémence?"

"No, monsieur, to-morrow at noon you shall know everything, and you will kneel before your wife. Ah! no, you shall not humble yourself. No, all is forgiven you. No, you have done no wrong. Listen. Yesterday you shattered me very ruthlessly, but life perhaps might not have been complete if I had not known that anguish; it is a dark shadow to bring out the brightness of days like heaven."

"You are bewitching me," Jules exclaimed, "and you would give me remorse."

"Poor love, fate overrules us, and I cannot help my destiny. I am going out to-morrow."

"When?"

"At half-past nine."

"Clémence, you must be very careful. You must consult Dr. Desplein and old Haudry."

"I shall consult my own heart and courage only."

"I will leave you free. I shall not come to see you till noon."

"Will you not stay with me a little while to-night? I am not ill now——"

Jules finished his work and came back to sit with her. He could not keep away. Love was stronger in him than all his griefs.

Next morning, at nine o'clock, Jules slipped out of the house, hurried to the Rue des Enfants-Rouges, climbed the stairs, and rang the bell at the Widow Gruget's door.

"Ah! You are a man of your word, punctual as sunrise," was old Mme. Gruget's greeting. "Come in, sir. I have a

cup of coffee and cream ready for you in case——” she added, when the door was closed. “Oh! and genuine cream, a little jar that I saw them fill with my own eyes at the cowkeeper’s near by in the Enfants-Rouges market.”

“Thank you, no, madame, nothing. Show me upstairs——”

“Very good, my dear gentleman. Step this way.”

She showed Jules into a room just above her own, and pointed triumphantly to a hole about as large as a two-franc piece, cut during the night so as to correspond with a rose in the pattern of the paper in Ferragus’ room. The opening had been made above a cupboard on either side the wall; the locksmith had left no trace of his handiwork; and from below it was very difficult to see this improvised loophole in a dark corner. If Jules meant to see or hear anything, he was obliged to stay there in a tolerably cramped position, perched on the top of a step which the Widow Gruget had thoughtfully placed for him.

“There’s a gentleman with him,” she said, as she went. And, in fact, Jules saw that some one was busy dressing a line of blisters raised on Ferragus’ shoulders. He recognized Ferragus from M. de Maulincour’s description of the man.

“When shall I be all right, do you think?” asked the patient.

“I do not know,” said the other; “but, from what the doctors say, seven or eight more dressings will be needed at least.”

“Very well, see you again this evening,” returned Ferragus, holding out a hand to the man as he adjusted the last bandage.

“This evening,” returned the other, shaking Ferragus cordially by the hand. “I should be glad to see you out of your pain.”

“At last Monsieur de Funcal’s papers are to be handed over to-morrow, and Henry Bourignard is really dead,” continued

Ferragus. "Those two unlucky letters that cost us so dear have been destroyed, so I shall be somebody, socially speaking ; a man among men again, and I am quite as good as the sailor whom the fishes have eaten. God knows whether it is for my own sake that I have taken a count's title."

"Poor Gratien ! you are the best head among us, our beloved brother, the Benjamin of the band. You know that."

"Farewell ; take good care of my Maulincour."

"You can set your mind at rest on that score."

"Ho ! stay, marquis !" cried the convict.

"What is it ?"

"Ida is capable of anything after the scene yesterday evening. If she flings herself into the river, I certainly shall not fish her out ; she will the better keep the secret of my name, the only secret she knows ; but look after her, for, after all, she is a kind creature."

"Very well."

The stranger went. Ten minutes afterward Jules heard the unmistakable rustle of silk, and almost knew the sound of his wife's footsteps, not without a fevered shiver.

"Well, father, poor father, how are you ? How brave you are ! " It was Clémence who spoke.

"Come here, child," said Ferragus, holding out his hand. And Clémence bent her forehead for his kiss.

"Let us see you, what is it, poor little girl ? What new troubles——?"

"Troubles, father ? It is killing me, killing the daughter who loves you so. As I wrote telling you yesterday, you absolutely must use that fertile brain of yours to find some way of seeing poor Jules this very day. If you only knew how good he has been to me in spite of suspicions that seemed so well founded ! Love is my life, father. Do you wish to see me die ? Oh ! I have been through so much as it is, and my life is in danger, I feel it."

"To lose you, my child ! to lose you for a miserable Paris-

ian's curiosity! I would set Paris on fire. Ah! you know what a lover is, but what a father is you do not, you cannot, know."

"You frighten me, father, when you look like that. Do not put two such different sentiments in the balance. I had my husband before I knew that my father was living——"

"If your husband was the first to set a kiss upon your forehead, I was the first to let tears fall there," said Ferragus. "Reassure yourself, Clémence; open your heart to me. I love you well enough to be happy in the knowledge that you are happy; although your father is almost nothing in your heart, while you fill his."

"Ah, God! such words make me too happy. You make me love you more than ever, and it seems to me that I am robbing something from my Jules. But just think that he is in despair, my good father. What shall I tell him in two hours' time?"

"Child, do you think that I waited for your letter to save you from this threatened unhappiness? What came to those who took it into their heads to meddle with your happy life, or to come between us? Why, have you never recognized a second Providence watching over you? And you do not know twelve men, full of vigor in mind and body, are like an escort about your love and your life, always ready to do any deed to save you? And the father who used to risk his life to see you as you took your walks; or came at night to see you in your little cot in your mother's room; that father who, from the memory of your childish kisses, and from these alone, drew strength to live when a man of honor must take his own life to escape a shameful fate; how should not he—how should not I, in short, that draw breath only through your lips—see only with your eyes, feel through your heart, how should I not defend you with a lion's claws and a father's soul, when you are all that I have, my only blessing, my life, my daughter? Why, since that angel died, that was your

mother, I have dreamed only one dream—of the joy of calling you my daughter openly, of clasping you in my arms before heaven and earth, of killing the convict——” (he paused for a moment)—“of giving you a father,” he continued; “I saw a time when I could grasp your husband’s hand without a blush, and live fearlessly in both your hearts, and say to the world: ‘This is my child!’—in short, I had visions of being a father at my ease.”

“Oh! father, father!”

“After many efforts, after searching the world over, my friends have found me a man’s shape to fill,” continued Ferragus. “In a few days’ time I shall be Monsieur de Funcal, a Portuguese count. There, dear child, there are few men of my age that would have patience to learn Portuguese and English, with which that confounded naval officer was perfectly acquainted.”

“My dear father!”

“Every contingency is provided for. In a few days his majesty, John VI., King of Portugal, will be my accomplice. So you only need a little patience when your father has had so much. But for me it was quite natural. What would I not do to reward your devotion during these three years? To come so dutifully to see your old father, risking your happiness as you did.”

“Father!” Clémence took Ferragus’ hands and kissed them.

“Come! a little more courage, Clémence; let us keep the fatal secret to the end. Jules is not an ordinary man; and yet, do we know whether with his lofty character and great love he will not feel something like disrespect for the daughter of——”

“Ah! you have read your child’s soul,” cried Clémence; “I have no fear but that,” she added, in a heart-rending tone. “The thought freezes my blood. But remember, father, I have promised him the truth in two hours.”

"Well, my child, tell him to go to the Portuguese embassy to see the Comte de Funcal, your father; I will be there."

"And how about Monsieur de Maulincour who talked about Ferragus? Ah, dear! to tell lie upon lie, what torture, father!"

"To whom are you speaking? Yet a few days, and no man alive can give me the lie. And beside, Monsieur de Maulincour is in no condition to remember anything by this time—— There, there, silly child, dry your tears, and bear in mind that——"

A dreadful cry rang from the next room, where Jules Desmarets was hiding.

"My girl, my poor girl!" The wail came through the loophole above the cupboard; Ferragus and Mme. Jules were terror-stricken by it.

"Go and see what it is, Clémence."

Clémence fled down the narrow staircase, found the door of Mme. Gruget's room standing wide open, and heard her voice ring out overhead. The sound of sobbing attracted her to the fatal room, and these words reached her ears as she entered—

"It is you, sir, with your notions, that have been the death of her!"

"Hush, wretched woman!" exclaimed Jules, trying to stop her cries with his pocket-handkerchief.

"Murder! Help!" cried the Widow Gruget. At that moment Clémence came in, saw her husband, shrieked aloud, and fled.

There was a long pause. "Who will save my daughter?" asked Mme. Gruget. "You have murdered her."

"And how?" asked Jules mechanically, stupefied by the thought that his wife had recognized him.

"Read that, sir," said she, bursting into tears. "Will any money comfort me for this?" and she held out a letter:

"Farewell, mother. I leave you all I have. I ask your pardon for my faults, and for this last grief I am bringing on you by making away with myself. Henry, that I love better than myself, said that I had done him harm, and he would have no more to do with me afterward; I have lost all hopes of establishing myself, and I shall go and throw myself into the river. I am going down below Neuilly, so as they shall never put me in the Morgue. If Henry doesn't hate me after I've punished myself with death, ask him to bury a poor girl whose heart only beat for him, and to forgive me, for I did wrong to meddle with what was no concern of mine. Dress his blisters carefully. He has suffered a deal, the poor dear. But I shall have as much courage to drown myself as he had to have himself burnt. There are some corsets ready; see that they are sent home. And pray God for your daughter.

"IDA."

"Take the letter to Monsieur de Funcal, in the next room. He is the only man that can save your daughter, if it is not too late." And Jules vanished, flying like a criminal when the deed is done. His legs shook under him. His swelling heart was sending a hotter and fuller tide through his veins, with a mightier pulse than he had ever known before. The most conflicting thoughts filled his mind, and yet one idea prevailed above them all. He had been disloyal to the one whom he loved best in the world; he could not compound with his conscience, its voice grew in proportion to the extent of the wrong that he had done, till the clamor filled him, as passion had filled his inmost being during the bitterest hours of the suspense which had shaken him but a short while ago. He dared not go home, and spent most of the day in wandering about Paris. Upright as he was, he shrank from confronting the blameless brow of the wife he had not rightly valued. The sin is in proportion to the purity of the conscience; and an act which for some is scarcely a mistake will

weigh like a crime upon a few white souls. Is there not, indeed, a divine significance in that word white? and does not the slightest spot on a virgin's garments degrade them at once to the level of the beggar's rags? Between the two there is but the difference between misfortune and error. Repentance is not proportioned to the sin; God makes no distinctions; it is as hard to wipe out one stain as to wash away the sins of a lifetime.

These thoughts lay heavily on Jules' soul. Justice is not more inexorable than passion, nor more ruthless in its reasoning; for passion has a conscience of its own, infallible as instinct. He went home again in despair, overwhelmed with a sense of the wrong he had done; but, in spite of himself, joy in his wife's innocence was visible in his pale face. He went to her room with a fast-throbbing heart, and found her lying in bed. She was in a high fever. He sat down by the bedside, took her hand, and kissed it and covered it with tears.

"Dear angel, they are the tears of repentance," he said, when they were alone.

"And for what?" she asked.

She bent her head down on the pillow as she spoke, and shut her eyes, and lay quite still, fearing, with a mother's, an angel's delicacy, to betray her pain and alarm her husband. The whole woman was summed up in those words. There was a long silence. Jules, fancying that Clémence was asleep, stole out to ask Joséphine about her mistress.

"Madame came in half-dead, sir. We sent for Monsieur Haudry."

"Has he been? What did he say?"

"Nothing, sir. He did not seem satisfied; he said that no one was to be allowed in the room except the nurse, and he would come again in the course of the evening."

Jules stole softly back to his wife, and sat down in an arm-chair by the bedside. He did not move; his eyes never left

hers. Whenever Clémence looked up she met their gaze, and from under her lashes there escaped a tender, sorrowful, impassioned glance—a glance that fell like a fiery dart in the inmost soul of the man thus generously absolved, and loved through everything by her whom he had done to death. Forebodings of death lay between them; death was a presence felt alike by both. Their looks were blended in the same agony, as their two hearts had been made one through love equally felt and shared. There were no questions now, but a dreadful certainty. In the wife, a perfect generosity; in the husband, a hideous remorse; and in both their souls one vision of the end, and the same consciousness of the inevitable.

There was a moment when Jules, thinking that his wife was asleep, kissed her softly on the forehead, gazed long at her, and said to himself: "Ah, God! leave this angel with me yet a while longer, that I may expiate my sins by long adoration. Heroic as a daughter; what word could describe her as a wife?"

Clémence opened her eyes; they were full of tears.

"You hurt me," she said in a weak voice.

It was growing late. Dr. Haudry came and asked Jules to leave the room while he saw his patient; and when he came out afterward there was no need to ask any questions—a gesture told all.

"Send for any of my colleagues in whom you have most confidence," said the doctor; "I may be mistaken."

"But, doctor, tell me the truth. I am not a child, I can hear it; and beside, I have the strongest reasons for wishing to know it, there are accounts to settle——"

"Madame Jules is death-stricken," said the doctor. "There is something on her mind which complicates the physical illness; the situation was dangerous as it was, and repeated imprudence has made it worse. Getting out of bed in the night with barefeet; going out on foot yesterday, and in the carriage to-day, when I forbade it, she must have meant

to kill herself. Still my verdict is not final; there is youth, and astonishing nervous strength—it might be worth while to risk all to save all by some violent reagent; but I could not take it upon myself to prescribe the treatment, I should not even advise it. I should oppose it in consultation.”

Jules went back to the room again. For eleven days he stayed night and day by his wife's bedside, sleeping only in the daytime, with his head on the bedfoot. Never did any man carry the ambition of devotion so far as Jules Desmarets. In a jealous anxiety to do everything himself, he would not allow any one else to perform the least service for his wife; he sat with her hand in his, as if in this way he could give of his own vitality to her. There were times of doubt and fallacious joy, good days, and an improvement, and crises, and the dreadful reverberations of the coming death, that hesitates while life hangs in the balance, but strikes at last. Mme. Jules was never too weak to smile; she was sorry for her husband, knowing that very soon he would be left alone. It was the twofold agony of life and love; but as life ebbed, love grew stronger.

Then came a dreadful night, when Clémence suffered from the delirium that always comes before death in young creatures. She talked aloud of her happy love, of her father, of her mother's death-bed revelations, and the charge she had laid upon her daughter. Clémence was struggling, not for life, but for the passionate love that she could not let go.

“God in heaven!” she cried out, “do not let him know how I want to have him die with me.”

Jules, unable to bear the sight, happened to be in the next room, and so did not hear the wish that he would have fulfilled.

When the crisis was over, Mme. Jules found strength. Next day she looked lovely and peaceful once more; she talked, she began to hope, and made a pretty invalid's toilet. She wanted to be alone all day, and entreated her husband to

leave her so earnestly, that he was fain to grant her wish, as a child's pleading is always granted. Jules, moreover, had need of the day. He went to M. de Maulincour to claim the duel to which both had agreed. He obtained an interview with the cause of his troubles, not without great difficulty; but the vidame, informed that it was an affair of honor, gave way in obedience to the chivalrous prejudices which had always ruled his life, and brought Monsieur Jules up to the Baron de Maulincour.

Monsieur Desmarets looked about him in a vain search for his antagonist.

"Oh, it really is he," said the commander, indicating the figure in the armchair by the fireside.

"He? who? Jules?" asked the dying man, in a broken voice.

Auguste had lost the one central faculty by which we live—memory. At sight of him M. Desmarets shrank back in horror. He could not recognize the youthful, fine gentleman in this Thing, for which there was no name in any language, to quote Bossuet's saying. It was, in truth, a white-haired corpse, a skeleton scarcely covered by the wrinkled, shriveled, withered skin. The eyes were pale and fixed, the mouth gaped hideously, like the mouth of an imbecile, or of some debauchee dying of excess. Not the faintest spark of intelligence was left to the forehead, nor indeed to any other feature; nor was there any appearance of color or of circulating blood in the flabby flesh. These were the shrunken, dissolving remains of what had been a human being, a man reduced to the condition of the monstrosities preserved in spirits at the Museum. Jules fancied he could see Ferragus' terrible head rising above that visage, and his hate shrank appalled at the completeness of the vengeance. Clémence's husband could find it in his heart to pity the unrecognizable wreck of what had been so lately a young man.

"The duel has taken place," said the vidame.

"Monsieur de Maulincour has taken many lives," Jules exclaimed in distress.

"And the lives of his nearest and dearest," added the old noble. "His grandmother is dying of grief, and I, perhaps, shall follow her to the tomb."

Mme. Jules grew worse from hour to hour on the day after the visit. She took advantage of a momentary strength to draw a letter from her pillow, and gave it quickly to Jules with a sign which no one could mistake; she wished to spend her last breath of life in a kiss. He took it, and she died.

Jules dropped down half-dead, and was taken away to his brother's house. There, as in the midst of tears and ravings he bewailed his absence of the day before, his brother told him how anxious Clémence had been that he should not be present during the church's administration of the last sacrament to the dying, that rite so terribly impressive for a sensitive imagination.

"You could not have borne it," said his brother. "I myself could scarcely endure to see it, and every one broke out into weeping. Clémence looked like a saint. She summoned up her strength to bid us farewell; it was heart-rending to hear that voice for the last time. And when she asked pardon for any involuntary unkindness to those who had served her, a wail went up among the sobs, a wail——"

"Enough, that will do."

He wanted to be alone to read his wife's last thoughts, now that she, the woman whom the world had admired, had faded away like a flower:

"This is my will, my dearest. Why should not people dispose of their heart's treasures, as of everything else that is theirs? The love in my heart—was it not all that I had? And here I want to think of nothing but love; it was all that your Clémence brought you, it is all that she can leave you when she dies. Jules, I am loved again, I can die a happy

woman. The doctors will have their theories of my death ; but no one knows the real cause but myself. I will tell you about it, in spite of the pain it may give you. I am dying because I kept a secret that could not be told, but I will not carry away a secret unsaid in the heart that is wholly yours.

“I was nurtured and brought up in complete solitude, far away from the vices and deceits of the world, by the amiable woman whom you knew, Jules. Society did justice to the conventional qualities by which a woman gains social popularity ; but I, in secret, enjoyed communion with an angel’s soul ; I could love the mother who gave me a childhood of joy without bitterness, knowing well why I loved her. Which means, does it not, that she was twice loved ? Yes. I loved and feared and respected her, yet neither the fear nor the respect oppressed my heart. I was all in all to her ; she was all in all to me. Through nineteen years of happiness known to the full, nineteen years without a care, my soul, lonely amid the world which murmured about me, mirrored nothing but the one most pure vision of my mother, and my heart beat for her alone. I was conscientiously devout. I was glad to lead a pure life in the sight of God. My mother cultivated all noble and lofty feelings and thoughts in me. Ah ! it gladdens me to own it, Jules. I know now that my girlhood was complete, that I came to you with a maiden heart.

“When I came out of the profound solitude ; when for the first time I smoothed my hair beneath a wreath of almond blossom, and added a few knots of satin ribbon to my white gown, thinking how pretty they looked, and wondering about this world that I was to see, and felt curious about ; well, Jules, even then, that simple girlish coquetry was for you ; at my first entrance into that new world I saw *you*—— I saw your face ; it stood out from all the others ; you were handsome, I thought ; your voice and your manner prepossessed me in your favor ; and when you came up and spoke to me, and your forehead flushed and your voice was tremulous—the memory of

that moment sets my heart throbbing even now as I write you to-day, when I think of it for the last time. Our love has been from the first the keenest of sympathies, and it was not long before we divined each other, and began to share, as we have shared ever since, the uncounted joys of love.

“From that day my mother had but the second place in my heart. I told her so, and she smiled, my adorable mother ! And since then I have been yours—yours wholly. That is my life, my whole life, my dear husband.

“And this is what remains to be said :

“One evening, a few days before my mother died, she told me the secret of her life, not without hot tears. I loved her more, far more, when I heard in the presence of the priest who absolved her that there was such a thing as passion condemned by the world and the church. Yet, surely, God must be merciful when love is the sin of souls as loving as hers, even though that angel could not bring herself to repent of it. She loved with all her heart, Jules, for all her heart was love. And so I prayed for her every day, without judging her. From that time I knew why her mother’s love had been so deep and tender ; from that time I knew, too, that in Paris there was some one living for whom I was everything—life and love. I knew, beside, that your success was due to him, and that he liked you, and that he was an outlaw with a blighted name, and that these things troubled him less for his own sake than for mine—for both our sakes. My mother had been his one comfort ; I promised to take her place now that she was dead. With all the enthusiasm of an unsophisticated nature, I thought of nothing but the joy of sweetening the bitterness of her last moments, so I pledged myself to continue her work of secret charity—the charity of the heart.

“I saw my father for the first time by the bed on which my mother had just drawn her last breath. When he raised his tear-filled eyes, it was to find all his dead hopes once more in me. I vowed, not to lie, but to keep silence ; and what woman

could have broken that silence? Therein lay my mistake—a mistake expiated by death—I could not trust you, Jules. But fear is so natural to a woman, especially to a wife who knows all that she has to lose. I was afraid for my love. It seemed to me that my father's secret might cost me my happiness; and the more I loved, the more I dreaded the loss of love. I dared not confess this to my father; it would have hurt him, and in his position any wound smarts keenly. But while he said not a word to me, he felt my fears. The true father's heart trembled for my happiness, and I trembled for myself, and shrank from speaking of it with the same delicacy which kept me mute.

“Yes, Jules, I thought that some day you might not love Gratien's daughter as you loved your Clémence. But for that dread in the depths of my heart, could I have hidden anything from you—from you that filled even this inmost recess?

“When that odious, miserable officer spoke to you, I was forced to tell a lie. That day I knew sorrow for the second time in my life, and that sorrow has grown day by day till this last moment of converse with you. What does my father's position matter now? You know everything. With love to aid me, I might have wrestled with disease and borne any pain; but I cannot smother the voice of doubt. Is it not possible that the knowledge of my origin may take something from your love, Jules, and weaken it, and spoil its purity? And this fear nothing can extinguish in me. *This* is the cause of my death.

“I could not live in continual dread of a word or a look, one word which might never be uttered, one glance that would never be given; but, I cannot help it—I *am afraid!* I have your love till I die, that comforts me. I have known for four years past that my father and his friends have all but turned the world upside down to act a lie to the world. They have bought a dead man, a reputation, and a fortune, and all to give a new life to a living man, and a social position to me—

all this for your sake, for our sakes ! We were to know nothing about it. Well, my death will probably save my father from the necessity of further falsehood, for he will die when I am dead.

“ So, farewell, Jules. I have put my whole heart here in this letter. When I show you my love in the innocence of its dread, do I not leave you my very soul ? I should not have had strength to tell you this, but I could write it for you.

“ I have just made confession of the sins of my lifetime to God ; I have promised, it is true, to think of nothing now but the Father in heaven ; but I could not resist the pleasure of confession to you, that are all to me upon earth. Alas ! who would not forgive me this last sigh between the life that is no more and the life to come ? So, farewell, Jules, my beloved ; I am going to God, with whom there is love unclouded for evermore, to whom you also will one day come. There, at the foot of the Throne of God, together for evermore, we shall love through all the ages. That hope alone can comfort me. If I am worthy to go first, I shall follow you through your life, my spirit will be with you and around you, for you must live on here below awhile. Lead a holy life, to rejoin me the more surely. You can do so much good here on this earth ! Is it not an angel’s mission for a stricken soul to spread happiness around, to give that which he has not ?

“ I leave the unhappy to your care ; how should I be jealous of their smiles, their tears ? We shall find a great charm in these sweet charities. Cannot we be together still, if you will associate my name, your Clémence’s name, with every kindly deed ? When two have loved as we have loved, Jules, there is nothing left but God ; God does not lie, God does not fail. Give all your love to Him, I ask it of you. Cultivate good in those who suffer, comfort the afflicted among the church on earth.

“ Adieu, dear heart that I have filled. I know you, I know

that you will not love twice; and I can die happy in a thought that would make any wife glad. Yes, I shall lie buried in your heart. Now that I have told you the story of my childhood, is not my whole life poured into your heart? I shall never be driven from it after I am dead. You have only known me in the flower of my youth; I shall leave nothing but regrets behind, and no disenchantment. Jules, that is a very happy death.

“May I ask one thing of you that have understood me so well, one thing needless to ask, no doubt—the fulfillment of a woman’s fancy, of a wish prompted by a jealousy to which all women are subject. I beg of you to burn all that belonged to us, to destroy our room, and everything that may recall our love.

“Once again, farewell, a last farewell full of love, as my last thought will be, and my latest breath.”

Jules finished the letter, and a frantic grief came upon his heart in terrible paroxysms which cannot be described. Every agony takes its own course, and obeys no fixed rule; some men stop their ears to hear no sound, women sometimes close their eyes to shut out all sights; and here and there a great and powerful soul plunges into sorrow as into an abyss. Despair makes an end of all insincerities. Jules escaped from his brother’s house, and returned to the Rue de Ménars, meaning to spend the night at his wife’s side, and to keep that divine creature in sight till the last. As he went, with the recklessness of a man brought to the lowest depths of misery, he began to understand why Asiatic laws forbid widows to survive their husbands. He wanted to die. He was in the fever of sorrow; the collapse had not yet set in.

He reached the sacred chamber without hindrance, saw Clémence lying on her death-bed, fair as a saint, her hair smoothed over her brows, her hands folded. She had been laid already in her shroud. The light of the tall candles fell

upon a priest at his prayers, on Joséphine, who was crying in a corner, and on two men by the bed. One of these was Ferragus. He stood erect and motionless, gazing dry-eyed at his daughter, you might have taken his face for a bronze statue; he did not see Jules. The other was Jacquet—Jacquet, to whom Mme. Jules had always been kind. He had felt for her the respectful friendship that brings warmth to the heart without troubling it, a softened passion, love without its longings and its tumult, and now he had come religiously to pay his debt of tears, to bid a long adieu to his friend's wife, and set a first and last kiss on the forehead of the woman of whom he had tacitly made his sister.

All was silent there. This was not the terrible death of the church, nor the pageantry of death that passes through the streets; it was death that glides in under the roof, death in his pathetic aspects; this was a lying in state for the heart amid tears shed in secret.

Jules sat down beside Jacquet, squeezed his friend's hand, and thus without a word they stayed till the morning. When the candles burnt faintly in the dawn, Jacquet thought of the painful scenes to come, and led Jules away into the next room. For a moment Clémence's husband looked full at her father, and Ferragus looked at Jules. Anguish questioned and sounded the depths of anguish, and both understood at a glance. A flash of rage glittered for an instant in Ferragus' eyes.

"It is your doing!" he thought.

"Why not have trusted me?" the other one seemed to retort.

So might two tigers have seen the uselessness of a conflict, after eyeing each other during a moment of hesitation, without so much as a growl.

"Jacquet, did you see to everything?" asked Jules.

"Yes, to everything; and everywhere some one else had been before me and given orders and paid."

"He is snatching his daughter from me!" shouted Jules, in a paroxysm of despair.

He dashed into the bedroom. The father had gone. Clémence had been laid in her leaden coffin. One or two workmen were preparing to solder down the lid, and Jules retreated aghast. At the sound of the hammer he broke out into dull weeping.

"Jacquet," he said at length, "one idea stays with me after this dreadful night, just one thought, but I must realize it, cost what it may. Clémence shall not lie in a Paris cemetery. She shall be cremated, and I will keep her ashes beside me. Do not say a word about it to me, but just arrange to have it done. I shall shut myself up in *her* room and stay there till I am ready to go. No one shall come in but you to tell me what you have done. There, spare for nothing."

That morning Mme. Jules' coffin lay under the archway with lighted candles round it, and was afterward removed to St. Roch. The whole church was hung with black. The kind of display made for the funeral service had attracted a great many people. Everything, even the most heartfelt anguish, is a theatrical spectacle in Paris. There are people who will stand at the windows to watch curiously while a son weeps in his mother's funeral procession, just as there are others who want good seats to see an execution. No people in the world have such voracious eyes. But the curious in St. Roch were particularly astonished to find the six side-chapels in the church likewise draped with black, and two men in mourning attending a mass for the dead in each. In the choir there were but two persons present at the funeral—M. Desmarets the notary and Jacquet—the servants were beyond the screen. The hangers-on of the church were puzzled by the splendor of the funeral and the insignificant number of mourners. Jules would have no indifferent persons.

High mass was celebrated with all the sombre grandeur of the funeral service. Thirteen priests from various parishes

were there beside the officiating clergy of St. Roch. The sound of blended voices rose as the eight chanters, the priests, and the boy-choristers sang antiphonally ; and never, perhaps, was the *Dies iræ* more deeply impressive than at that moment, never did it strike an icier chill to the nerves of Christians by accident of birth, assembled there by chance, curiosity, and greed of sensation. From the side-chapels twelve other childish voices, shrill with grief, rose wailing in the chorus. A dull note of dismay reverberated through the church ; cries of anguish answered wails of terror on every side. That awful music spoke of agony unknown on earth, of secret friendship weeping for the dead. Never has any known religion given so powerful a rendering of the terrors of the soul, stripped violently of the body, and tossed as by tempest into the presence of the intolerable Majesty of God. Before that clamor of clamors, artists and their most impassioned work must shrink abashed. No, nothing can stand beside that music which gathers up all human passions, galvanizing them into a life beyond the grave, bringing them, yet palpitating, into the presence of the living God, the Avenger. Man's life, with all its developments, is embraced by that Canticle of Death ; for the cries of children, mingled with the notes of deeper voices, recall the pains of cradled infancy, swelled by the sum of all the pain of life's later stages, by the full-toned bass, and the quavering notes of old men and of priests. Does not the volume of strident melody, full of thunder and lightnings, speak to the most undaunted imagination, to the ice-bound heart, nay, to philosophers themselves ? As you hear it, it seems that God thunders. The vaults of every chapel are cold no longer ; they quiver, and find a voice, and pour forth fear with all the might of their echoes. You seem to see visions of the uncounted dead rising and holding up their hands. It is not a father, a wife or child, that lies beneath the black drapery ; it is Humanity emerging from the dust. It is impossible to be just to the Apostolic and Roman Catholic

Church until you have passed through a supreme sorrow, and wept for the beloved dead lying beneath the cenotaph; until you have heard all the emotion which fills your heart, interpreted by that Hymn of Despair, by those cries that overwhelm the soul, by the religious awe that rises from strophe to strophe, eddying up to heaven, appalling, diminishing, exalting the soul, till as the last verse comes to an end you are left with the sense of Eternity. You have been wrestling with the vast idea of the Infinite; and now all is hushed in the church. Not a word is uttered there. Unbelievers themselves "know not what ails them." Spanish genius alone could invest unspeakable sorrow with such transcendent majesty.

When the solemn ceremony was over, twelve men in mourning emerged from the chapels, and stood grouped around the coffin to hear the chant of hope which the church raises for the Christian's soul before the human form is committed to earth. Then each of them entered a mourning coach, Jacquet and M. Desmarests took the thirteenth, and the servants followed on foot.

An hour afterward the twelve strangers were gathered about a grave, dug at the highest point of the cemetery familiarly known as Père-Lachaise; the coffin had just been lowered; a curious crowd had gathered from all parts of that public garden. The priest recited a short prayer, and flung a handful of earth over the mortal remains; and the sexton and his men, having claimed their fee, hastily began to fill up the grave before going to another.

And here this story would seem to finish. Yet perhaps it would be incomplete if the practical effects of death should be forgotten at the close of a slight sketch of Parisian life, and its capricious undulations. Death in Paris is unlike death in any other great city; few people know what it is to bring a heartfelt sorrow into conflict with civilization in the shape of the municipal authorities of Paris. Perhaps, too, the reader

may feel sufficient interest in Ferragus XXIII. and Jules Desmarests to care to know what became of them. And in any case, there are plenty of people who like to know all about everything; and, as the most ingenious of French critics once said, would find out the chemistry of the combustion of the oil of Aladdin's lamp if they could.

Jacquet, being a civil servant, naturally applied to the authorities for permission to exhume and cremate Mme. Jules' body. The dead sleep under the protection of the prefect of police; to the prefect of police, therefore, Jacquet betook himself. That functionary required a formal application. A sheet of stamped paper must be purchased, sorrow must appear in the regulation form; and when a man is so overwhelmed with grief that words fail him, he must express himself in the peculiar idiom of red-tape, and translate his wishes into business-like phrases with a marginal note:

“The petitioner prays permission to cremate
the body of his wife.”

The head of the department, whose duty it was to draw up a report for the prefect of police, a member of the Council of State, glanced over the marginal note, in which the object of the request was clearly stated by his own instruction, and said—

“But this is a serious question. It is impossible to draw up a report in less than a week.”

Jacquet was obliged to explain the delay, and Jules thought of the words he had heard Ferragus utter: “Set Paris on fire!” Nothing seemed more natural than a thorough destruction of that receptacle of monstrous things.

“Why, there is nothing for it but to apply to the Secretary of the Interior and set your Minister on to him,” he told Jacquet.

Jacquet accordingly applied to the Home Office, and asked for an audience, which he obtained—for that day two weeks.

Jacquet was naturally persistent. He went, therefore, from department to department, and succeeded in reaching the private secretary of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. With such influence he received a promise of a private interview with the pasha of the Home Office, and a few lines written by the autocrat of Foreign Affairs by way of passport. Jacquet now had hopes of carrying his point by storm. He was ready for every emergency with arguments and categorical answers. All ended in failure.

"This is no affair of mine," said the Minister. "The thing concerns the prefect of police. And what is more: no law gives a husband the custody of his wife's body, nor has a father a right to a child's corpse. It is a serious matter. It ought to be looked into, beside, in the interests of the public. The city of Paris might suffer. In short, if the matter were referred directly to me, I could not give a decision *hic et nunc*; a report would be required."

In the administrative system a "report" answers much the same end as limbo or paradise does in theology. Jacquet had met with the "report" craze before; nor had he neglected previous opportunities of groaning over the absurdities of red tape. He knew that since the administrative Revolution of 1804, when the report had carried all before it in Government departments, the minister had not yet been found that would take it upon himself to have an opinion, or give a decision on any matter, however small, until the thing had been winnowed, sifted, and thoroughly scrutinized by the scribblers and scratchers and sublime official intelligences of his department.

Jacquet—the man deserved to have a Plutarch for his biographer—Jacquet saw that he had set off on the wrong tack, and defeated his own ends by trying to proceed by the proper forms. He should simply have removed Mme. Jules' coffin after the service to one of the Desmarets' houses in the country. There the mayor of the village would have made no

difficulty about gratifying the sorrowing widower's request. Constitutional and administrative legalism is sterile ; it is a barren monster for nations and kings and the interests of private individuals ; but the nations as yet have only learned to spell those principles that are written in blood ; and as the evils of ruling by the letter of the law are never accompanied by strife and bloodshed, legalism reduces a nation to a dead level, and there is an end of it.

Jacquet, being a stickler for liberty, returned home, meditating by the way on the blessings of arbitrary government ; for a man only criticises the law of the land by the light of his own passions. But when he came to talk to Jules, there was nothing for it but to deceive his friend ; the unhappy man was in a high fever, and for a couple of days he stayed in bed.

That evening at dinner the minister chanced to mention that the fancy had taken some one in Paris to have his wife's body cremated in the Roman fashion. And for a moment classical funeral rites were the talk of the clubs. As things ancient were coming into fashion, several people were of the opinion that it would be a fine thing to revive the funeral pyre for distinguished personages. Some were for, and others against, the idea. Some held that there were so many great men that the practice would raise the price of fuel ; they opined that with a nation so fond of the mental exercise of changing its opinions, it would be a ridiculous thing to see a whole Longchamp of ancestors trotted out in their urns at the expiration of a lease ; while, if the urns happened to be valuable, creditors (a race that never respects anything) would seize upon them, and they, with their contents of honorable dust, would be put up to public auction. Others retorted that it was scarcely possible for a man to insure a permanent residence for his grandparents in Père-Lachaise ; for that in time the city of Paris would be compelled to order a St. Bartholomew of its dead. The cemeteries were invading the open country, and threatened to encroach upon the grain land of

le Brie. In short, the question raised one of the futile and ingenious discussions which, in Paris, too often aggravates deep-seated evils. Happily for Jules, he knew nothing of the conversation, jokes, and epigrams with which his sorrow supplied the town.

The prefect of police took offense because M. Jacquet had gone straight to the minister to avoid the delays and matured wisdom of the Board of Works. The exhumation of Mme. Jules' body was a question within the jurisdiction of the municipal police. Wherefore the police department was elaborating a sharp answer to the petition. A single demand is enough, the administration has a tight hold, and a thing once in its grasp is like to go a long way. Any matter, moreover, may be referred to the Council of State, another piece of machinery very hard to set in motion. Another day went by, and Jacquet made his friend understand that the idea must be given up; that in a city where the number of "tears" embroidered on the black trappings are prescribed, where the law recognizes seven classes of funerals, where land in which to bury the dead is sold by its weight in silver, where grief is exploited on a system of double entry, and the prayers of the church are sold dear, or the vestry puts in a claim for a few extra voices in the *Dies iræ*—any deviation from the beaten rut traced out for grief by the authorities was impossible.

"It would have been one joy in my misery," said Jules; "I meant to go somewhere, a long way off, to die, and I wished when I lay in the grave to have Clémence in my arms. I did not know that officialdom could put out its claws to reach us even in our coffins."

He would go to see whether there was a little room for him beside his wife. So the friends went together to Père-Lachaise. At the gateway they found a crowd of ciceroni waiting to guide sight-seers through the labyrinth, as if Père-Lachaise were a museum or the Cour des Diligences or some other sight. It was impossible that Jules or Jacquet should find Clémence's

tomb. Terrible agony! They went to consult the gatekeeper.

The dead have a gatekeeper, and there are hours at which the dead cannot receive visitors. Only by shaking all the rules and regulations from top to bottom can any one obtain the right to go thither in the darkness to weep in silence and solitude over the grave which holds his beloved dead. There are summer regulations and winter regulations. Of all the concierges of Paris, the gatekeeper of Père-Lachaise is the best off. There is no cord to pull, to begin with. Instead of a single room, he has a house, an establishment that cannot exactly be described as a government department, although there is a considerable staff attached, and the jurisdiction is wide, and the governor of the dead draws a salary and wields an immense power over a population who cannot possibly complain of him; he plays the despot at his ease. Neither is his abode exactly a place of business, albeit there are offices and books to be kept, and clerks to keep them, and receipts and expenditure and profits. And the gatekeeper himself is neither a Swiss nor a concierge nor a porter, for the door is always yawning wide for the dead; and though there certainly are monuments to be kept in order, he is not there to look after them. He is, in short, an anomaly which cannot be defined; his office is akin in one way or another to every power in existence, and yet he is a nobody, for his authority, like Death, by which it lives, lies completely beyond the pale. Nevertheless, exception as he is, he holds his tenure from the City of Paris, a creature as chimerical as the emblematical vessel on her coat of arms; an imaginary being swayed by hundreds of paws and claws which seldom move in concert; and, as a result, her public servants are, to all intents and purposes, fixtures. The cemetery-keeper, therefore, is the concierge promoted to the rank of a public servant, a permanent element amid dissolution.

His place, for that matter, is no sinecure. No one can be

buried till the gatekeeper has seen the permit ; and he is bound to give account of his dead. He can lay his finger on a spot in that huge burying ground to point out the six feet of earth in which some day you will lay all that you love, or hate, as the case may be—the mistress you love or your unloved cousin. For, mind you, to this lodge all loves and hates must come at the last, and are duly docketed and passed through the office. The man keeps a register of sleeping-places for the dead ; they go down on his list when they go down into the grave.

The gatekeeper has custodians under him, and gardeners and grave-diggers and assistants. He is a personage. Mourners are not brought into direct contact with him as a rule ; he only comes forward if something serious occurs, if one dead man is mistaken for another, or if a body is exhumed for a murder case, or a corpse comes to life again. The bust of the reigning sovereign presides in his room. Possibly he keeps other busts of departed monarchs, with various royal, imperial, or semi-royal persons, in a cupboard somewhere, a sort of miniature Père-Lachaise for changes in the Government. In other respects, he is a public servant ; an excellent man, a good husband and father, epitaphs apart ; but—so much varied emotion has passed under his eyes in the shape of hearses ! he has seen so many tears shed, both sham and real, and been acquainted with grief in so many shapes and in so many faces—with six millions of eternal sorrows, in short ! For him, grief means a stone slab an inch thick, four feet high by twenty-two inches wide. As for regrets, they are one of the things to be put up with in his profession, and he never dines but he has witnessed torrents of tears shed by inconsolable affliction. Every other emotion finds him kindly and sympathetic ; he, too, can shed tears over the tragic end of a stage hero like M. Germeuil in *L'Auberge des Adrets*, he is moved when the man in the butter-colored breeches is murdered by Robert Macaire ; but when it comes to a real genuine

death, his heart is ossified. Deaths mean rows of figures for him ; it is his business to tabulate statistics of the dead. And, as a last word, twice, or perhaps thrice in a century, it may happen that he has a sublime part to play, and then he is a hero at every hour—in time of pestilence.

When Jacquet went in search of this absolute monarch, his majesty's temper had suffered somewhat.

"I told you," he cried, "to water all the flowers from the Rue Masséna to the Place Regnault de Saint-Jean d'Angely ! You fellows simply took not the least notice of what I told you. My patience ! if the relatives take it into their heads to come, as it is a fine day, they will be throwing all the blame on me. They will call out as if they had been burnt, and say frightful things about us up here, and our characters will be taken away——"

"Sir," put in Jacquet, "we should like to know where Madame Jules was buried."

"Madame Jules *who* ? We have had three Jules this week. Ah ! " (interrupting himself as he glanced at the gate), "here comes Colonel de Maulincour's funeral, go out for the permit. My word ! it is a fine funeral," he added. "He has not been long about following his grandmother. Some families seem to drop off for a wager. They have such bad blood, have those Parisians ! "

Jacquet tapped him on the arm.

"Sir, the person of whom I am speaking was Madame Jules Desmarets, the stockbroker's wife."

"Oh, I know !" returned he, looking at Jacquet. "Thirteen mourning coaches at the funeral, weren't there ? and only one relation apiece in the first dozen. It was so queer that we noticed it——"

"Take care, sir ; Monsieur Jules is with me, he might overhear you ; and you ought not to talk like that."

"I beg your pardon, sir, you are right. Excuse me, I took you for the next-of-kin. Madame Jules is in the Rue du

Maréchal Lefebvre, side-walk Number 4," he continued, after consulting a plan of the ground ; "she lies between Mademoiselle Raucourt of the Comédie Française and Monsieur Moreau-Malvin, a butcher in a big way of business. There is a white marble monument on order for him ; it will be one of the finest things to be seen in the cemetery here, and that's a fact."

"We are no nearer, sir," Jacquet broke in.

"And that is true," said the other, looking round.

"Jean !" he called, as a man came in sight. "Show these gentlemen the way to Madame Jules' grave, the stockbroker's wife. You know ! Next to Mademoiselle Raucourt's where there is a bust."

And the friends set out with their conductor ; but before they reached the steep path which leads to the higher part of the cemetery they must run the gantlet of a score or more of stone-cutters, carvers, and makers of wrought-iron work, who came up to insinuate in honeyed accents that, "if monsieur would like to have something put up, we could do it for him very reasonably——"

Jacquet was glad enough to be there to stand between his friend and words intolerable for bleeding hearts. They reached the spot where she lay. At the sight of the rough sods and the row of pegs driven in by the laborers to mark out the space for the iron railings. Jules leaned upon Jacquet's shoulder, raising his head at intervals to give a long look at the little patch of clay where he must leave all that remained of her for whom and through whom he still lived.

"How hard for her to lie there !"

"But she is not there !" protested Jacquet ; "she lives in your memory. Come away ; let us leave this horrid place, where the dead are tricked out like women at a ball," he continued.

"How if we took her out of it ?"

"Is it possible ?"

"All things are possible!" cried Jules. Then, after a pause: "So I shall come here some day; there is room for me."

Jacquet succeeded in getting him out of the inclosure. The tombs inclosed in those sprucely kept chessboard compartments marked out by iron railings are covered with inscriptions and sculptured palms, and tears as cold as the marble on which survivors record their regrets and their coats-of-arms. You may read jests there, carved in black letters, epigrams at the expense of the curious, pompous biographies, and ingeniously worded farewells. Here some one bides tryst, and, as usual in such cases, bides alone. Here you behold a floriated thyrus, there a lance-head railing; farther on there are Egyptian vases and now and again cannon; while spangles, tinsel, and trash meet your eyes wherever you turn them. You see trade-signs in every direction. Every style—Moorish, Grecian, and Gothic—is represented, together with every variety of decoration—friezes, egg-mouldings, paintings, urns, genii, and temples, among any quantity of dead rose-bushes and faded immortelles. It is a scandalous comedy! Here is Paris over again—streets, trade-signs, industries, houses and all complete; but it is a Paris seen through the wrong end of the perspective glass, a microscopic city, a Paris diminished to a shadow of itself, and shrunk to the measure of these chrysalides of the dead, this human species that has dwindled so much in everything save vanity.

Jules caught a glimpse of the view. At his feet, in the long valley of the Seine, between the low ridges of Vaugirard and Meudon, Belleville and Montmartre, lay the real Paris, in a blue haze of its own smoke, now sunlit and transparent. He glanced from under his eyelids over the forty thousand houses of the city, and waved his hand toward the space between the column of the Place Vendôme and the cupola of the Invalides.

"There she was taken from me," he cried, "by the fatal

curiosity of a world which seeks bustle and excitement for the sake of excitement and bustle."

Eight or nine miles farther away down the Seine valley, in a little village on one of the lower slopes of those ridges of hill, between which the great, restless city lies, like a child in its cradle, another sad death scene was taking place; but here there was none of the funeral pomp of Paris—there were no torches, no tall candle, no mourning-coaches hung with black, no prayers of the church; this was death reduced to the bare fact. And this was the fact. A girl's body stranded that morning on the bank, among the reeds that grow in the Seine mud. Some sand-dredgers on their way to work caught sight of it as they went up the river in their crazy boat.

"Halloo! fifty francs for us!" cried one.

"Right you are!" said the other.

They came close up to the dead body.

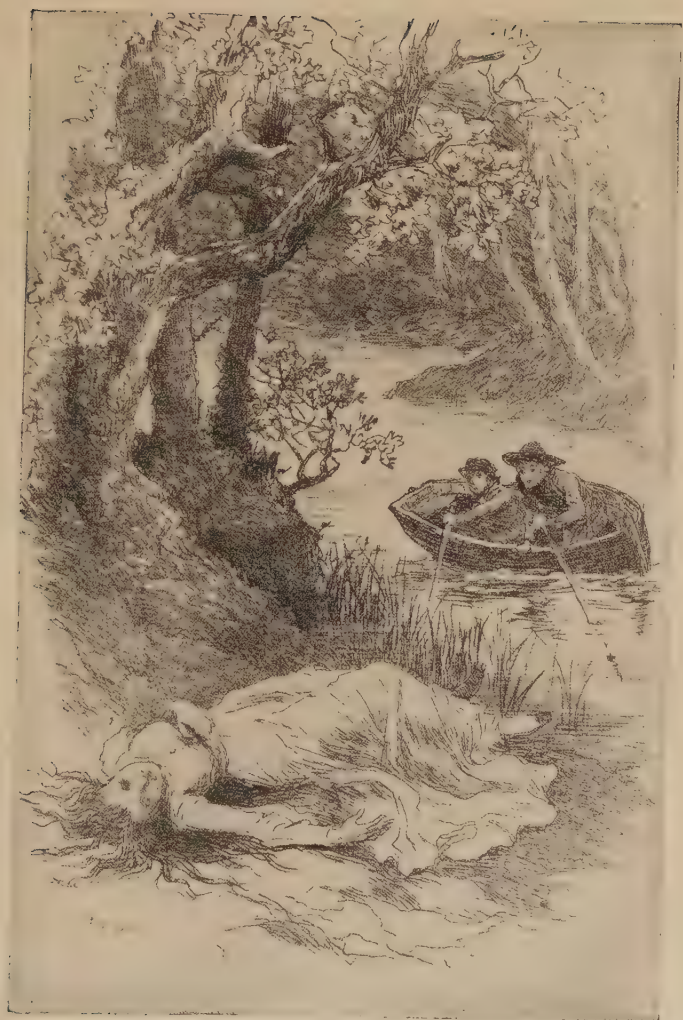
"She is a very fine girl."

"Let us go and give notice."

And the two dredgers, first covering the corpse with their jackets, went off to the mayor; and that worthy was not a little puzzled to know how to draw up an official report of the discovery.

The rumor spread with the telegraphic speed peculiar to neighborhoods where communications are uninterrupted; the gossip on which the world battens, and scandal, tittle-tattle, and slander, rush in to fill the vacuum between any given points. In a very short time people came to the mayor's office to relieve that gentleman of any difficulty, and among them they converted the official report into an ordinary certificate of death. Through their assiduity the girl's body was identified; it was proven to be that of Mlle. Ida Gruget, stay-maker, of No. 14 Rue de la Corderie du Temple. At this stage of the proceedings the police intervened, and the Widow Gruget, the girl's mother, appeared with her daughter's fare-

A GIRL'S BODY STRANDED THAT MORNING ON THE BANK.





well letter. While the mother sighed and groaned, a medical man ascertained that death had ensued from asphyxia and an access of venous blood to the pulmonary organs. That was all.

The inquest being over, and particulars filled in, the authorities gave permission for the burial of the body. The curé of the place declined to allow the procession to enter the church or to pray for the repose of the dead.* So an old peasant-woman sewed Ida Gruget in her shroud, she was laid in a rough coffin made of pine-boards, and carried to the churchyard on four men's shoulders. Some few country-women had the curiosity to follow, telling the story of the death with comments of pitying surprise. An old lady charitably kept the widow, and would not allow her to join the sad little procession. A man, who fulfilled the threefold office of sexton, beadle, and bell-ringer, dug a grave in the churchyard, a half acre of ground at the back of the well-known church, a classical building with a square tower buttressed at the corners, and a slate-covered spire. The churchyard, bounded by crumbling walls, lies behind the round apse; there are no marble headstones there, and no visitors; but not one, surely, of all the mounds that furrow the space, lacked the tears and heartfelt regrets which no one gave to Ida Gruget. They put her down out of sight in a corner among the nettles and tall grasses; the bier was lowered into its place in that field so idyllic in its simplicity, and in another moment the gravedigger was left alone to fill in the grave in the gathering dusk. He stopped now and again to look over into the road below the wall; once, with his hand on his pickaxe, he gazed intently at the Seine which had brought this body for him to bury.

"Poor girl!" exclaimed a voice; and suddenly a man came up.

"How you startled me, sir!" said the sexton.

* Interment in consecrated ground is denied the body of a suicide.

"Was there any service for this woman that you are burying?"

"No, sir. Monsieur the Curé would not allow it. She is the first person buried here that is not of this parish. Everybody knows everybody else hereabout. Does monsieur——? Halloo! he is gone!"

Several days slipped by. A man in black came to the house in the Rue de Ménars; the stranger did not wish to speak to Jules; he went to Mme. Jules' room and left a large porphyry vase there, bearing the inscription—

INVITA LEGE,
CONJUGI MŒRENTI
FILIOLÆ CINERES
RESTITUIT
AMICIS XII JUVANTIBUS
MORIBUNDUS PATER.

"What a man!" exclaimed Jules, bursting into tears.

In one week Jules had carried out all his wife's wishes, and set his own affairs in order. He sold his professional connection to a brother of Martin Falleix, and left Paris behind him, while the municipality was still debating whether or not a citizen had any legal claim to his wife's dead body.

Who has not met on the Paris boulevards, at a street corner, under the arcades of the Palais Royal—anywhere, in short, as chance may determine—some stranger, man or woman, whose face sets a host of confused thoughts springing up in his brain? It grows suddenly interesting at sight, perhaps because some personal singularity suggests a stormy life; perhaps gestures, gait, air, and costume all combine to present a curious whole; perhaps because a searching glance or an indescribable something makes a sudden, strong impression before you can ex-

plain the cause very clearly to yourself. On the morrow, other thoughts, other pictures of Paris life sweep away the passing dream. But if you happen to meet the same person again; if he is always passing along the street at the same hour (like a clerk at the registrar's office, for instance, whose presence is required at marriages eight hours daily); if he is one of those wandering mortals who seem to be a part of the furniture of the streets of Paris, and you see him again and again in public places, on first nights, or in those restaurants of which he is the fairest ornament—— then that figure becomes a tenant in your memory, and stays there like an odd volume of a novel without a conclusion.

You are tempted to go up to the stranger and ask: "Who are you? Why are you sauntering about the streets? What right have you to wear a crumpled collar, a cane with an ivory knob, and a seedy vest? Why those blue spectacles with double glasses?" or "What makes you cling to that old-style cravat?"

Some among these errant creatures belong to the progeny of Terminus, god of boundaries; they say nothing to your soul. There they are; that is all. Why are they there? Nobody knows. They are conventional signs, like the hackneyed figures used by sculptors to represent the Four Seasons, or Commerce, or Plenty. Others, again, retired attorneys, or storekeepers, or antique generals, walk about, and always appear to be much the same. They never seem to be a part of the torrent of Paris, with its throng of young bustling men; rather, they remind you of half-uprooted trees by a river-side. It is impossible to say whether other people forgot to bury them, or whether they escaped out of their coffins. They have reached a semi-fossil condition.

One of these Paris Melmoths had come for several days past to make one of a sedate, self-contained little crowd which never fails to fill the space between the Southern gate of the Luxembourg Gardens and the North gate of the Observatory,

whenever the weather is bright. It is a place by itself, a neutral space in Paris. It lies out of the city, as it were, and yet the city is all about it. It partakes of the nature of a square, a thoroughfare, a boulevard, a fortification, a garden, an avenue, and a highway; it is provincial and Parisian; it is every one of these things, and not one of them; it is a desert. All about that nameless spot rise the walls of the Foundling Hospital, the Hôpital Cochin, the Capuchins, La Bourbe, the Hospice de la Rochefoucauld, the Deaf and Dumb Asylum, and the hospital of the Val-de-Grâce. All the sin and suffering of Paris, in fact, finds a refuge in its neighborhood; and that nothing may be wanting in so philanthropic a quarter, students of science repair thither to study the ebb and flow of the tides and latitude and longitude. M. de Chateaubriand too established the Marie-Thérèse Infirmary not very far away, and the Carmelites founded a convent near by. In that desert the sound of bells never ceases, every stroke represents one of the solemn moments in man's life; the mother in travail, the newborn babe, the dying laborer, the nun at prayer, perishing vice, shivering age, disappointed genius. Only a few paces away lies the Mont-Parnasse Cemetery, whither shabby funerals go all day long from the crowded Faubourg Saint-Marceau.

Players at bowls have monopolized this esplanade with its view of Paris—gray-headed, homely, good-natured worthies are they, who continue the line of our ancestors, and can only be compared as to externals with their public, the moving gallery which follows them about. The man before alluded to as new to this deserted quarter was an assiduous spectator of the game, and certainly might be said to be the most striking figure in these groups; for if it is permissible to classify Parisians zoologically, the other bystanders unmistakably belonged to the mollusc species. The new-comer would walk sympathetically with the jack, the small ball—the *cochonnet*, at which the other balls are aimed, the centre of

interest in the game; and when it came to a stand, he would lean against a tree, and watch as a dog watches his master, while the bowls flew or rolled past. You might have taken him for the fantastic tutelar spirit of the jack. He never uttered a word. The players themselves, as zealous fanatics as could be found in any religious sect, had never taken him to task for his persistent silence, though some free-thinkers among them held that the man was deaf and dumb. Whenever there was occasion to measure the distance between the bowls and the jack, the stranger's cane was taken as the standard of measurement. The players used to take it from his ice-cold fingers without a word, or even a friendly nod. The loan of the cane was a kind of "easement" which he tacitly permitted. If a shower came on he stayed beside the jack—the slave of the bowls, the guardian of the unfinished game. He took rain and fine weather equally as a matter of course; like the players, he was a sort of intermediate species between the stupidest Parisian and the most intelligent of brutes. In other respects he was pale and withered-looking, absent-minded, and careless of his dress. He often came without his hat. His square-shaped head and bald, sallow cranium showed through his white hair, like a beggar's knee thrust through a hole in his breeches. He shambled uncertainly about with his mouth open; his vacant eyes were never turned to the sky, he never raised them indeed, and always seemed to be looking for something on the ground. At four o'clock an old woman would come for him and take him away somewhere or other, towing him after her as a girl tugs a capricious goat which insists on browsing when it is time to go back to the shed. It was something dreadful to see the old man.

It was afternoon. Jules, sitting alone in his traveling carriage, was driven rapidly along the Rue de l'Est, and came out upon the Carrefour de l'Observatoire, just as the old man, leaning against a tree, allowed himself to be despoiled of his

cane amid the vociferous clamor of the players, in pacific dispute over their game. Jules, fancying that he knew the face, called to the postillion to stop, and the carriage came to a stand there and then. As a matter of fact, the postillion, wedged in among heavy carts, was in nowise anxious to ask the insurgent players at bowls to allow him to pass; he had too much respect for uproars, had that postillion.

"It is he!" Jules exclaimed, finally recognizing Ferragus XXIII., Chef des Dévorants, in that human wreck. "How he loved her!" he added after a pause. "Go on, postillion!" he shouted.

PARIS, *February*, 1833.



II.

THE DUCHESS DE LANGEAIS.

To Franz Liszt.

In a Spanish city on an island in the Mediterranean there stands a convent of the order of Barefooted Carmelites, where the rule instituted by St. Theresa is still preserved with all the first rigor of the reformation brought about by that illustrious woman. Extraordinary as this may seem, it is none the less true. Almost every religious house in the peninsula, or in Europe for that matter, was either destroyed or disorganized by the outbreak of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars; but as this island was protected through those times by the English fleet, its wealthy convent and peaceable inhabitants were secure from the general trouble and spoliation. The storms of many kinds which shook the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century spent their force before they reached those cliffs at so short a distance from the coast of Andalusia.

If the Emperor's name so much as reached the shore of the island, it is doubtful whether the holy women kneeling in the cloisters grasped the reality of his dream-like progress of glory, or the majesty that blazed in flame across kingdom after kingdom during his meteor life.

In the minds of the Roman Catholic world, the convent stood out preëminent for a stern discipline which nothing had changed; the purity of its rule had attracted unhappy women from the farthest parts of Europe, women deprived of all human ties, sighing after the long suicide accomplished in the breast of God. No convent, indeed, was so well fitted for that complete detachment of the soul from all earthly things, which is demanded by the religious life, albeit on the continent of Europe there are many convents magnificently adapted

to the purpose of their existence. Buried away in the loneliest valleys, hanging in mid-air on the steepest mountain-sides, set down on the brink of precipices, in every place man has sought for the poetry of the Infinite, the solemn awe of Silence ; in every place man has striven to draw closer to God, seeking Him on mountain-peaks, in the depths below the crags, at the cliff's edge ; and everywhere man has found God. But nowhere, save on this half-European, half-African ledge of rock could you find so many different harmonies, combining so to raise the soul, that the sharpest pain comes to be like other memories ; the strongest impressions are dulled, till the sorrows of life are laid to rest in the depths.

The convent stands on the highest point of the crags at the uttermost end of the island. On the side toward the sea the rock was once rent sheer away in some globe-cataclysm ; it rises up a straight wall from the base where the waves gnaw at the stone below high-water mark. Any assault is made impossible by the dangerous reefs that stretch far out to sea, with the sparkling waves of the Mediterranean playing over them. So, only from the sea can you discern the square mass of the convent built conformably to the minute rules laid down as to the shape, height, doors, and windows of monastic buildings. From the side of the town, the church completely hides the solid structure of the cloisters and their roofs, covered with broad slabs of stone impervious to sun or storm or gales of wind.

The church itself, built by the munificence of a Spanish family, is the crowning edifice of the town. Its fine, bold front gives an imposing and picturesque look to the little city in the sea. The sight of such a city, with its close-huddled roofs, arranged for the most part amphitheatre-wise above a picturesque harbor, and crowned by a glorious cathedral front with triple-arched Gothic doorways, belfry towers, and filigree spires, is a spectacle surely in every way the sublimest on earth. Religion towering above daily life, to put men continually in

mind of the end and the way, is in truth a thoroughly Spanish conception. But now surround this picture by the Mediterranean, and a burning sky, imagine a few palms here and there, a few stunted evergreen trees mingling their waving leaves with the motionless flowers and foliage of carved stone; look out over the reef with its white fringes of foam in contrast to the sapphire sea; and then turn to the city, with its galleries and terraces whither the inhabitants come to take the flower-scented air as it rises of an evening above the houses and the tops of the trees in their little gardens; add a few sails down in the harbor; and lastly, in the stillness of falling night, listen to the organ music, the chanting of the services, the wonderful sound of bells pealing out over the open sea. There is sound and silence everywhere; oftener still there is silence over all.

Within the church is divided into a sombre, mysterious nave and narrow aisles. For some reason, probably because the winds are so high, the architect was unable to build the flying buttresses and intervening chapels which adorn almost all cathedrals, nor are there openings of any kind in the walls which support the weight of the roof. Outside there is simply the heavy wall structure, a solid mass of gray stone further strengthened by huge piers placed at intervals. Inside, the nave and its little side-galleries are lighted entirely by the great stained-glass rose-window suspended by a miracle of art above the centre doorway; for upon that side the exposure permits of the display of lacework in stone and of other beauties peculiar to the style improperly called Gothic.

The larger part of the three naves was left for the townsfolk, who came and went and heard mass there. The choir was shut off from the rest of the church by a grating and thick folds of brown curtain, left slightly apart in the middle in such a way that nothing of the choir could be seen from the church except the high altar and the officiating priest. The grating itself was divided up by the pillars which supported

the organ loft ; and this part of the structure, with its carved wooden columns, completed the line of the arcading in the gallery carried by the shafts in the nave. If any inquisitive person, therefore, had been bold enough to climb upon the narrow balustrade in the gallery to look down into the choir, he could have seen nothing but the tall eight-sided windows of stained glass beyond the high altar.

At the time of the French expedition into Spain to establish Ferdinand VII. once more on the throne, a French general came to the island after the taking of Cadiz, ostensibly to require the recognition of the King's government, really to see the convent and to find some means of entering it. The undertaking was certainly a delicate one ; but a man of passionate temper, whose life had been, as it were, but one series of poems in action, a man who all his life long had lived romances instead of writing them, a man preëminently a Doer, was sure to be tempted by a deed which seemed to be impossible.

To open the doors of a convent of nuns by lawful means ! The metropolitan or the Pope would scarcely have permitted it ! And as for force or stratagem—might not any indiscretion cost him his position, his whole career as a soldier, and the end in view to boot ? The Duc d'Angoulême was still in Spain ; and of all the crimes which a man in favor with the commander-in-chief might commit, this one alone was certain to find him inexorable. The general had asked for the mission to gratify private motives of curiosity, though never was curiosity more hopeless. This final attempt was a matter of conscience. The Carmelite convent on the island was the only nunnery in Spain which had baffled his search.

As he crossed from the mainland, scarcely an hour's distance, he felt a presentiment that his hopes were to be fulfilled ; and afterward, when as yet he had seen nothing of the convent but its walls, and of the nuns not so much as their robes ; while he had merely heard the chanting of the

service, there were dim auguries under the walls and in the sound of the voices to justify his frail hope. And, indeed, however faint those so unaccountable presentiments might be, never was human passion more vehemently excited than the general's curiosity at that moment. There are no small events for the heart; the heart exaggerates everything; the heart weighs the fall of a fourteen-year-old Empire and the dropping of a woman's glove in the same scales, and the glove is nearly always the heavier of the two. So here are the facts in all their prosaic simplicity. The facts first, the emotions will follow.

An hour after the general landed on the island, the royal authority was reëstablished there. Some few Constitutional Spaniards who had found their way thither after the fall of Cadiz were allowed to charter a vessel and sail for London. So there was neither resistance nor reaction. But the change of government could not be effected in the little town without a mass, at which the two divisions under the general's command were obliged to be present. Now, it was upon this mass that the general had built his hopes of gaining some information as to the sisters in the convent; he was quite unaware how absolutely the Carmelites were cut off from the world; but he knew that there might be among them one whom he held dearer than life, dearer than honor.

His hopes were cruelly dashed at once. Mass, it is true, was celebrated with great pomp. In honor of such a solemnity, the curtains which always hid the choir were drawn back to display its riches, its valuable paintings and shrines so bright with gems that they eclipsed the glories of the votive offerings of gold and silver hung up by sailors of the port on the columns in the naves. But all the nuns had sought seclusion in the organ-loft. And yet, in spite of this first check, during this very mass of thanksgiving, the most intimately thrilling drama that ever set a man's heart beating opened out widely before him.

The sister who played the organ aroused such intense enthusiasm, that not a single man regretted that he had come to the service. Even the men in the ranks were delighted, and the officers were in ecstasy. As for the general, he was seemingly calm and indifferent. The sensations stirred in him as the sister played one piece after another belong to the small number of things which it is not lawful to utter ; words are powerless to express them ; like Death, God, Eternity, they can only be realized through their one point of contact with humanity. Strangely enough, the organ music seemed to belong to the school of Rossini, the musician who brings most human passion into his art. Some day his works, by their number and extent, will receive the reverence due to the Homer of music. From among all the scores that we owe to his great genius, the nun seemed to have chosen "*Moses in Egypt*" for special study, doubtless because the spirit of sacred music finds therein its supreme expression. Perhaps the soul of the great musician, so gloriously known to Europe, and the soul of this unknown executant had met in the intuitive apprehension of the same poetry. So at least thought two dilettanti officers who must have missed the Theatre Favart in their Spanish exile.

At last in the *Te Deum* no one could fail to discern a French soul in the sudden change that came over the music. Joy for the victory of the Most Christian King evidently stirred this nun's heart to the depths. She was a Frenchwoman beyond mistake. Soon the love of country shone out, breaking forth like shafts of light from the fugue, as the sister introduced variations with all a Parisienne's fastidious taste, and blended vague suggestions of our grandest national airs with her music. A Spaniard's fingers would not have brought this warmth into a graceful tribute paid to the victorious arms of France. The musician's nationality was revealed.

"We find France everywhere, it seems," said one of the men.

The general had left the church during the *Te Deum* ; he could not listen any longer. The nun's music had been a revelation of a woman loved to frenzy ; a woman so carefully hidden from the world's eyes, so deeply buried in the bosom of the church, that hitherto the most ingenious and persistent efforts made by men who brought great influence and unusual powers to bear upon the search had failed to find her. The suspicion aroused in the general's heart became all but a certainty with the vague reminiscence of a sad, delicious melody, the air of "*Fleuve du Tage*."* The woman he loved had played the prelude to the ballet in a boudoir in Paris, how often ! and now this nun had chosen the song to express an exile's longing, amid the joy of those that triumphed. Terrible sensation ! To hope for the resurrection of a lost love, to find her only to know that she was lost, to catch a mysterious glimpse of her after five years—five years, in which the pent-up passion, chafing in an empty life, had grown the mightier for every fruitless effort to satisfy it !

Who has not known, at least once in his life, what it is to lose some precious thing ; and after hunting through his papers, ransacking his memory, and turning his house upside down ; after one or two days spent in vain search, and hope, and despair ; after a prodigious expenditure of the liveliest irritation of soul, who has not known the ineffable pleasure of finding that all-important nothing which had come to be a kind of monomania ? Very good. Now, spread that fury of search over five years ; put a woman, put a heart, put Love in the place of the trifle ; transpose the monomania into the key of high passion ; and, furthermore, let the seeker be a man of ardent temper, with a lion's heart and a leonine head and mane, a man to inspire awe and fear in those who come in contact with him—realize this, and you may, perhaps, understand why the general walked abruptly out of the church when the first notes of a ballad, which he used to hear with a rap-

* *The Tagus River.*

ture of delight in a gilt-paneled boudoir, began to vibrate along the aisles of the church in the sea.

The general walked away down the steep street which led to the port, and only stopped when he could not hear the deep notes of the organ. Unable to think of anything but the love which broke out in volcanic eruption, filling his heart with fire, he only knew that the *Te Deum* was over when the Spanish congregation came pouring out of the church. Feeling that his behavior and attitude might seem ridiculous, he went back to head the procession, telling the *alcalde* and the governor that, feeling suddenly faint, he had gone out into the air. Casting about for a plea for prolonging his stay, it at once occurred to him to make the most of this excuse, framed on the spur of the moment. He declined, on a plea of increasing indisposition, to preside at the banquet given by the town to the French officers, betook himself to his bed, and sent a message to the major-general, to the effect that temporary illness obliged him to leave the colonel in command of the troops for the time being. This commonplace but very plausible stratagem relieved him of all responsibility for the time necessary to carry out his plans. The general, nothing if not "Catholic and monarchical," took occasion to inform himself of the hours of the services, and manifested the greatest zeal for the performance of his religious duties, piety which caused no remark in Spain.

The very next day, while the division was marching out of the town, the general went to the convent to be present at vespers. He found an empty church. The townsfolk, devout though they were, had all gone down to the quay to watch the embarkation of the troops. He felt glad to be the only man there. He tramped noisily up the nave, clanking his spurs till the vaulted roof rang with the sound; he coughed, he talked aloud to himself to let the nuns know, and more particularly to let the organist know that if the troops were

gone, one Frenchman was left behind. Was this singular warning heard and understood? He thought so. It seemed to him that in the *Magnificat* the organ made response which was borne to him on the vibrating air. The nun's spirit found wings in music and fled toward him, throbbing with the rhythmical pulse of the sounds. Then, in all its might, the music burst forth and filled the church with warmth. The Song of Joy set apart in the sublime liturgy of Latin Christianity to express the exaltation of the soul in the presence of the glory of the Ever-living God became the utterance of a heart almost terrified by its gladness in the presence of the glory of a mortal love; a love that yet lived, a love that had risen to trouble her even beyond the grave in which the nun is laid, that she may rise again the bride of Christ.

The organ is in truth the grandest, the most daring, the most magnificent of all instruments invented by human genius. It is a whole orchestra in itself. It can express anything in response to a skilled touch. Surely it is in some sort a pedestal on which the soul poises for a flight forth into space, essaying on her course to draw picture after picture in an endless series, to paint human life, to cross the Infinite that separates heaven from earth? And the longer a dreamer listens to those giant harmonies, the better he realizes that nothing save this hundred-voiced choir on earth can fill all the space between kneeling men and a God hidden by the blinding light of the sanctuary. The music is the one interpreter strong enough to bear up the prayers of humanity to heaven, prayer in its omnipotent moods, prayer tinged by the melancholy of many different natures, colored by meditative ecstasy, upspringing with the impulse of repentance—blended with the myriad fancies of every creed. Yes. In those long vaulted aisles the melodies inspired by the sense of things divine are blent with a grandeur unknown before, are decked with new glory and might. Out of the dim daylight, and the deep silence broken by the chanting of the choir in re-

sponse to the thunder of the organ, a veil is woven for God, and the brightness of His attributes shines through it.

And this wealth of holy things seemed to be flung down like a grain of incense upon the fragile altar raised to Love beneath the eternal throne of a jealous and avenging God. Indeed, in the joy of the nun there was little of that awe and gravity which should harmonize with the solemnities of the *Magnificat*. She had enriched the music with graceful variations, earthly gladness throbbing through the rhythm of each. In such brilliant quivering cadences some great singer might strive to find a voice for her love, her melodies fluttered as a bird carols buoyantly about its mate. There were moments when she seemed to leap back into the past, to dally there, now with laughter, now with tears. Her changing moods, as it were, ran riot. She was like a woman excited and happy over her lover's return.

But at length, after the swaying fugues of delirium, after the marvelous rendering of a vision of the past, a revulsion swept over the soul that thus found utterance for itself. With a swift transition from the major to the minor, the organist told her hearer of her present lot. She gave the story of long melancholy broodings, of the slow course of her moral malady. How day by day she deadened the senses, how every night cut off one more thought, how her heart was slowly reduced to ashes. The sadness deepened shade after shade through languid modulations, and in a little while the echoes were pouring out a torrent of grief. Then, on a sudden, high notes rang out like the voices of angels singing together, as if to tell the lost but not forgotten lover that their spirits now could only meet in heaven. Pathetic hope! Then followed the Amen. No more joy, no more tears in the air, no sadness, no regrets. The Amen was the return to God. The final chord was deep, solemn, even terrible; for the last rumblings of the bass sent a shiver through the audience that raised the hair on their heads; the nun shook out her veiling of crepe,

and seemed to sink again into the tomb from which she had risen for a moment. Slowly the reverberations died away; it seemed as if the church, but now so full of musical light, had returned to thick darkness.

The general had been caught up and borne swiftly away by this strong-winged spirit; he had followed the course of its flight from beginning to end. He understood to the fullest extent the imagery of that burning symphony; for him the chords reached deep and far. For him, as for the sister, the poem meant future, present, and past. Is not music, and even opera music, a sort of text, which a susceptible or poetic temper, or a sore and stricken heart, may expand as memories shall determine? If a musician must needs have the heart of a poet, must not the listener, too, be in a manner a poet and a lover to hear all that lies in great music? Religion, love, and music—what are they but a threefold expression of the same fact, of that craving for expansion which stirs in every noble soul. And these three forms of poetry ascend to God, in whom all passion on earth finds its end. Wherefore the holy human trinity finds a place amid the infinite glories of God; of God, whom we always represent surrounded with the fires of love and cymbals of gold—music and light and harmony. Is not He the Cause and the End of all our strivings?

The French general guessed rightly that here in the desert, on this bare rock in the sea, the nun had seized upon music as an outpouring of the passion that still consumed her. Was this her manner of offering up her love as a sacrifice to God? Or was it Love exultant in triumph over God? The questions were hard to answer. But one thing at least the general could not mistake—in this heart, dead to the world, the fire of passion burned as fiercely as in his own.

Vespers over, he went back to the *alcalde's* house upon whom he was quartered. In the all-absorbing joy which comes in such full measure when a satisfaction sought long and painfully is attained at last, he could see nothing beyond this—

he was still loved ! In her heart love had grown in loneliness, even as his love had grown stronger as he surmounted one barrier after another which this woman had set between them ! The glow of soul came to its natural end. There followed a longing to see her again, to contend with God for her, to snatch her away—a rash scheme, which appealed to a daring nature. He went to bed, when the meal was over, to avoid questions ; to be alone and think at his ease ; and he lay absorbed by deep thought till day broke.

He rose early to go to mass. He went to the church and knelt close to the screen, with his forehead touching the curtain ; he would have torn a hole in it if he had been alone, but his host had come with him out of politeness, and the least imprudence might compromise the whole future of his love and ruin the new-found hopes.

The organ sounded, but it was another player, and not the nun of the last two days whose hands touched the keys. It was all colorless and cold for the general. Was the woman he loved prostrated by emotion which well-nigh overcame a strong man's heart ? Had she so fully realized and shared an unchanged, longed-for love, that now she lay dying on her bed in her cell ? While innumerable thoughts of this kind perplexed his mind, the voice of the woman he worshiped rang out close beside him ; he knew its clear resonant soprano. It was her voice, with that faint tremor in it which gave it all the charm that shyness and diffidence give to a young girl ; her voice, distinct from the mass of singing as a prima donna's in the chorus of a finale. It was like a golden or silver thread in dark frieze.

It was she ! There could be no mistake. Parisienne now as ever, she had not laid coquetry aside when she threw off worldly adornments for the veil and the Carmelite's coarse serge. She who had affirmed her love last evening in the praise sent up to God seemed now to say to her lover : " Yes, it is I. I am here. My love is unchanged, but I am beyond

the reach of love. You will hear my voice, my soul shall enfold you, and I shall abide here under the brown shroud in the choir from which no power on earth can tear me. Thou canst never see me more ! ”

“ It is she indeed ! ” the general said to himself, raising his head. He had leant his face on his hands, unable at first to bear the intolerable emotion that surged like a whirlpool in his heart, when that well-known voice vibrated under the arcaiding, with the sound of the sea for accompaniment.

Storm was without, and calm within the sanctuary. Still that rich voice poured out all its caressing notes ; it fell like balm on the lover’s burning heart ; it blossomed upon the air—the air that a man would fain breathe more deeply to receive the affluence of a soul breathed forth with love in the words of the prayer. The alcalde coming to join his guest found him in tears during the elevation, while the nun was singing, and brought him back to his house. Surprised to find so much piety in a French military officer, the worthy magistrate invited the confessor of the convent to meet his guest. Never had news given the general more pleasure ; he paid the ecclesiastic a good deal of attention at supper, and confirmed his Spanish hosts in the high opinion they had formed of his piety by a not wholly disinterested respect. He inquired with gravity how many sisters there were in the convent, and asked for particulars of its endowment and revenues, as if from courtesy he wished to hear the good priest discourse on the subject most interesting to him. He informed himself as to the manner of life led by the holy women. Were they allowed to go out of the convent, or to see visitors ?

“ Señor,” replied the venerable churchman, “ the rule is strict. A woman cannot enter a monastery of the order of St. Bruno without a special permission from his holiness, and the rule here is equally stringent. No man may enter a convent of Barefooted Carmelites unless he is a priest specially

attached to the services of the house by the archbishop. None of the nuns may leave the convent; though the great saint, Mother Theresa, often left her cell. The visitor or the mothers superior can alone give permission, subject to an authorization from the archbishop, for a nun to see a visitor, and then especially in a case of illness. Now we are one of the principal houses, and consequently we have a mother superior here. Among other foreign sisters there is one Frenchwoman, Sister Theresa; she it is who directs the music in the chapel."

"Oh!" said the general, with feigned surprise. "She must have rejoiced over the victory of the House of Bourbon."

"I told them the reason of the mass; they are always a little bit inquisitive."

"But Sister Theresa may have interests in France. Perhaps she would like to send some message or to hear news."

"I do not think so. She would have spoken to me."

"As a fellow-countryman, I should be quite curious to see her," said the general. "If it is possible, if the lady superior consents, if——"

"Even at the grating, and in the reverend mother's presence, an interview would be quite impossible for anybody whatsoever; but strict as the mother is, for a deliverer of our holy religion and the throne of his Catholic majesty, the rule might be relaxed for a moment," said the confessor, blinking. "I will speak about it."

"How old is Sister Theresa?" inquired the lover. He dared not ask any questions of the priest as to the nun's beauty.

"She does not reckon years now," the good man answered, with a simplicity that made the general shudder.

Next day before siesta, the confessor came to inform the French general that Sister Theresa and the mother consented to receive him at the grating in the parlor before ves-

pers. The general spent the siesta in pacing to and fro along the quay in the noonday heat. Thither the priest came to find him, and brought him to the convent by way of the gallery round the cemetery. Fountains, green trees, and rows of arcading maintained a cool freshness in keeping with the place.

At the farther end of the long gallery the priest led the way into a large room divided in two by a grating covered with a brown curtain. In the first, and in some sort public half of the apartment, where the confessor left the new-comer, a wooden bench ran round the wall, and two or three chairs, also of wood, were placed near the grating. The ceiling consisted of bare unornamented joists and cross-beams of ilex wood. As the two windows were both on the inner side of the grating, and the dark surface of the wood was a bad reflector, the light in the place was so dim that you could scarcely see the great black crucifix, the portrait of Sainte-Theresa, and a picture of the Madonna which adorned the gray parlor walls. Tumultuous as the general's feelings were, they took something of the melancholy of the place. He grew calm in that homely quiet. A sense of something vast as the tomb took possession of him beneath the chill unceiled roof. Here, as in the grave, was there not eternal silence, deep peace—the sense of the Infinite? And beside this there was the quiet and the fixed thought of the cloister—a thought which you felt like a subtle presence in the air, and in the dim dusk of the room; an all-pervasive thought nowhere definitely expressed, and looming the larger in the imagination; for in the cloister the great saying: “Peace in the Lord,” enters the least religious soul as a living force.

The monk's life is scarcely comprehensible. A man seems confessed a weakling in a monastery; he was born to act, to live out a life of work; he is evading a man's destiny in his cell. But what man's strength, blended with pathetic weakness, is implied by a woman's choice of the convent life! A

man may have any number of motives for burying himself in a monastery ; for him it is the leap over the precipice. A woman has but one motive—she does not unsex herself ; she betroths herself to a heavenly bridegroom. Of the monk you may ask : “ Why did you not fight your battle ? ” But if a woman immures herself in the cloister, is there not always a sublime battle fought first ?

At length it seemed to the general that that still room and the lonely convent in the sea were full of thoughts of him. Love seldom attains to solemnity ; yet surely a love still faithful in the breast of God was something solemn, something more than a man had a right to look for as things are in this nineteenth century ? The infinite grandeur of the situation might well produce an effect upon the general’s mind ; he had precisely enough elevation of soul to forget politics, honors, Spain, and society in Paris, and to rise to the height of this lofty climax. And what in truth could be more tragic ? How much must pass in the souls of these two lovers, brought together in a place of strangers, on a ledge of granite in the sea ; yet held apart by an intangible, unsurmountable barrier ! Try to imagine the man saying within himself : “ Shall I triumph over God in her heart ? ” when a faint rustling sound made him quiver, and the curtain was drawn aside.

Between him and the light stood a woman. Her face was hidden by the veil that drooped from the folds upon her head ; she was dressed according to the rule of the order in a gown of the color become proverbial. Her bare feet were hidden ; if the general could have seen them, he would have known how appallingly thin she had grown ; and yet in spite of the thick folds of her coarse gown, a mere covering and no ornament, he could guess how tears, and prayer, and passion, and loneliness had wasted the woman before him.

An ice-cold hand, belonging, no doubt, to the mother superior, held back the curtain. The general gave the enforced witness of their interview a searching glance, and met

the dark, inscrutable gaze of an aged recluse. The mother might have been a century old, but the bright, youthful eyes belied the wrinkles that furrowed her pale face.

"Madame la Duchesse," he began, his voice shaken with emotion, "does your companion understand French?" The veiled figure bowed her head at the sound of his voice.

"There is no duchess here," she replied. "It is Sister Theresa whom you see before you. She whom you lightly call my companion is my mother in God, my superior here on earth."

The words were so meekly spoken by the voice that sounded in other years amid harmonious surroundings of refined luxury, the voice of a queen of fashion in Paris. Such words from the lips that once spoke so lightly and flippantly struck the general dumb with amazement.

"The holy mother only speaks Latin and Spanish," she added.

"I understand neither. Dear Antoinette, make my excuses to her."

The light fell full upon the nun's figure; a thrill of deep emotion betrayed itself in a faint quiver of her veil as she heard her name softly spoken by the man who had been so hard in the past.

"My brother," she said, drawing her sleeve under her veil, perhaps to brush tears away, "I am Sister Theresa."

Then, turning to the superior, she spoke in Spanish; the general knew enough of the language to understand what she said perfectly well; possibly he could have spoken it had he chosen to do so.

"Dear mother, the gentleman presents his respects to you, and begs you to pardon him if he cannot pay them himself, but he knows neither of the languages which you speak——"

The aged nun bent her head slowly, with an expression of angelic sweetness, enhanced at the same time by the consciousness of her power and dignity.

"You know this gentleman?" she asked, with a keen glance.

"Yes, mother."

"Go back to your cell, my daughter!" said the mother imperiously.

The general slipped aside behind the curtain lest the dreadful tumult within him should appear in his face; even in the shadow it seemed to him that he could still see the superior's piercing eyes. He was afraid of her; she held his little, frail, hard-won happiness in her hands; and he, who had never quailed under a triple row of guns, now trembled before this nun. The duchess went toward the door, but she turned back.

"Mother," she said, with dreadful calmness, "the Frenchman is one of my brothers."

"Then stay, my daughter," said the superior, after a pause.

The piece of admirable jesuitry told of such love and regret, that a man less strongly constituted might have broken down under the keen delight in the midst of a great and, for him, an entirely novel peril. Oh! how precious words, looks, and gestures became when love must baffle lynx eyes and tiger's claws! Sister Theresa came back.

"You see, my brother, what I have dared to do only to speak to you for a moment of your salvation and of the prayers that my soul puts up for your soul daily. I am committing mortal sin. I have told a lie. How many days of penance must expiate that lie! But I shall endure it for your sake. My brother, you do not know what happiness it is to love in heaven; to feel that you can confess love purified by religion, love transported into the highest heights of all, so that we are permitted to lose sight of all but the soul. If the doctrine and the spirit of the saint to whom we owe this refuge had not raised me above earth's anguish, and caught me up and set me, far indeed beneath the Sphere wherein she dwells, yet truly above this world, I should not have seen you again.

But now I can see you, and hear your voice, and remain calm——”

The general broke in: “But, Antoinette, let me see you, you whom I love passionately, desperately, as you could have wished me to love you.”

“Do not call me Antoinette, I implore you. Memories of the past hurt me. You must see no one here but Sister Theresa, a creature who trusts in the Divine mercy.” She paused for a little, and then added: “You must control yourself, my brother. Our mother would separate us without pity if there is any worldly passion in your face, or if you allow the tears to fall from your eyes.”

The general bowed his head to regain self-control; when he looked up again he saw her face beyond the grating—the thin, white, but still impassioned face of the nun. All the magic charm of youth that once bloomed there, all the fair contrast of velvet whiteness and the color of the Bengal rose, had given place to a burning glow as of a porcelain jar with a faint light shining through it. The wonderful hair in which she took such pride had been shaven; there was a bandage round her forehead and about her face. An ascetic life had left dark traces about the eyes, which still sometimes shot out fevered glances; their ordinary calm expression was but a veil. In a few words, she was but the ghost of her former self.

“Ah! you that have come to be my life, you must come out of this tomb! You were mine; you had no right to give yourself, even to God. Did you not promise me to give up all at the least command from me? You may, perhaps, think me worthy of that promise now when you hear what I have done for you. I have sought you all through the world. You have been in my thoughts at every moment for five years; my life has been given to you. My friends, very powerful friends, as you know, have helped with all their might to search every convent in France, Italy, Spain, Sicily, and America. Love burned more brightly for every vain search. Again and again

I made long journeys with a false hope ; I have wasted my life and the heaviest throbbings of my heart in vain under many a dark convent wall. I am not speaking of a faithfulness that knows no bounds, for what is it ?—nothing compared with the infinite longings of my love. If your remorse long ago was sincere, you certainly ought not to hesitate to follow me to-day."

"You forget that I am not free."

"The duke is dead," he answered quickly.

Sister Theresa flushed red.

"May heaven be open to him !" she cried with a quick rush of feeling. "He was generous to me. But I did not mean such ties ; it was one of my sins that I was ready to break them all without scruple—for you."

"Are you speaking of your vows ?" the general asked, frowning. "I did not think that anything weighed heavier with your heart than love. But do not fear, Antoinette ; the Holy Father himself shall absolve you of your oath. I will surely go to Rome, I will entreat all the powers on earth ; if God could come down from heaven, I would——"

"Do not blaspheme."

"So do not fear the anger of God. Ah ! I would far rather hear that you would leave your prison for me ; that this very night you would let yourself down into a boat at the foot of the cliffs. And we would go away to be happy somewhere at the world's end, I know not where. And, with me at your side, you should come back to life and health under the wings of love."

"You must not talk like this," said Sister Theresa ; "you do not know what you are to me now. I love you far better than I ever loved you before. Every day I pray for you ; I see you with other eyes. Armand, if you but knew the happiness of giving yourself up, without shame, to a pure friendship which God watches over ! You do not know what joy it is to me to pray for heaven's blessing on you. I never pray for

myself: God will do with me according to His will ; but, at the price of my soul, I wish I could be sure that you are happy here on earth, and that you will be happy hereafter throughout all ages. My eternal life is all that trouble has left me to offer up to you. I am old now with weeping ; I am neither young nor fair ; and in any case, you could not respect the nun who became a wife ; no love, not even motherhood, could give me absolution. What can you say to outweigh the uncounted thoughts that have gathered in my heart during the past five years, thoughts that have changed, and worn, and blighted it ? I ought to have given a heart less sorrowful to God."

"What can I say ? Dear Antoinette, I will say this, that I love you ; that affection, love, a great love, the joy of living in another heart that is ours, utterly and wholly ours, is so rare a thing and so hard to find, that I doubted you, and put you to sharp proof ; but now, to-day, I love you, Antoinette, with all my soul's strength. If you will follow me into solitude, I will hear no voice but yours, I will see no other face."

"Hush, Armand ! You are shortening the little time that we may be together here on earth."

"Antoinette, will you come with me ?"

"I am never away from you. My life is in your heart, not through the selfish ties of earthly happiness, or vanity, or enjoyment ; pale and withered as I am, I live here for you, in the breast of God. As God is just, you shall be happy——"

"Words, words all of it ! Pale and withered ? How if I want you ? How if I cannot be happy without you ? Do you still think of nothing but duty with your lover before you ? Is he never to come first and above all things else in your heart ? In time past you put social success, yourself, heaven knows what, before him ; now it is God, it is the welfare of my soul ! In Sister Theresa I find the duchess over again, ignorant of the happiness of love, insensible as ever, beneath the sem-

blance of sensibility. You do not love me; you have never loved me——”

“Oh, my brother——!”

“You do not wish to leave this tomb. You love my soul, do you say? Very well, through you it will be lost for ever. I shall make away with myself——”

“Mother!” Sister Theresa called aloud in Spanish, “I have lied to you; this man is my lover!”

The curtain fell at once. The general, in his stupor, scarcely heard the doors within as they clanged together with violence.

“Ah! she loves me still!” he cried, understanding all the sublimity of that cry of hers. “She loves me still. She must be carried off.”

The general left the island, returned to headquarters on the peninsular, pleaded ill-health, asked for leave of absence, and forthwith took his departure for France.

And now for the incidents which brought the two personages in this Scene into their present relation to each other.

The thing known in France as the Faubourg Saint-Germain is neither a quarter, nor a sect, nor an institution, nor anything else that admits of a precise definition. There are great houses in the Place Royale, the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, and the Chaussée d’Antin, in any one of which you may breathe the atmosphere of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. So, to begin with, the whole faubourg is not within the faubourg. There are men and women born far enough away from its influences who respond to them and take their place in the circle; and again there are others, born within its limits, who may yet be driven forth for ever. For the last forty years the manners, and customs, and speech, in a word, the tradition of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, have been to Paris what the Court used to be to it in other times; it is what the Hôtel Saint-Paul was

to the fourteenth century; the Louvre to the fifteenth; the Palais, the Hôtel Rambouillet, and the Place Royale to the sixteenth; and lastly, as Versailles was to the seventeenth and the eighteenth.

Just as the ordinary work-a-day Paris will always centre about some point; so, through all periods of history, the Paris of the nobles and the upper classes converges toward some particular spot. It is a periodically recurrent phenomenon which presents ample matter for reflection to those who are fain to observe or describe the various social zones; and possibly an inquiry into the causes that bring about this centralization may do more than merely justify the probability of this episode; it may be of service to serious interests which some day will be more deeply rooted in the commonwealth, unless, indeed, experience is as meaningless for political parties as it is for youth.

In every age the great nobles, and the rich who always ape the great nobles, build their houses as far as possible from crowded streets. When the Duc d'Uzés built his splendid hôtel in the Rue Montmartre in the reign of Louis XIV., and set the fountain at his gates—for which beneficent action, to say nothing of his other virtues, he was held in such veneration that the whole quarter turned out in a body to follow his funeral—when the duke, I say, chose this site for his house, he did so because that part of Paris was almost deserted in those days. But when the fortifications were pulled down, and the market gardens beyond the line of the boulevards began to fill with houses, then the d'Uzés family left their fine mansion, and in our time it was occupied by a banker. Later still, the noblesse began to find themselves out of their element among storekeepers, left the Place Royale and the centre of Paris for good, and crossed the river to breathe freely in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where palaces were reared already about the great hôtel built by Louis XIV.* for

* Louis the Great.

the Duc de Maine—the Benjamin of his legitimatized sons. And indeed, for people accustomed to a stately life, can there be more unseemly surroundings than the bustle, the mud, the street cries, the bad smells, and narrow thoroughfares of a populous quarter? The very habits of life in a mercantile or manufacturing district are completely at variance with the lives of nobles. The storekeeper and artisan are just going to bed when the great world is thinking of dinner; and the noisy stir of life begins among the former when the latter have gone to rest. Their day's calculations never coincide; the one class represents the expenditure, the other the receipts. Consequently their manners and customs are diametrically opposed.

Nothing contemptuous is intended by this statement. An aristocracy is in a manner the intellect of the social system, as the middle classes and the proletariat may be said to be its organizing and working power. It naturally follows that these forces are differently situated; and of their antagonism there is bred a seeming antipathy produced by the performance of different functions, all of them, however, existing for one common end.

Such social dissonances are so inevitably the outcome of any charter of the Constitution, that however much a Liberal may be disposed to complain of them, as of treason against those sublime ideas with which the ambitious plebeian is apt to cover his designs, he would none the less think it a preposterous notion that M. le Prince de Montmorency, for instance, should continue to live in the Rue Saint-Martin at the corner of the street which bears that nobleman's name; or that M. le Duc de Fitz-James, descendant of the royal house of Scotland, should have his hôtel at the angle of the Rue Marie Stuart and the Rue Montorgueil. *Sint ut sunt, aut non sint*, the grand words of the jesuit, might be taken as a motto by the great in all countries. These social differences are patent in all ages; the fact is always accepted by the people; its

“reasons of state” are self-evident ; it is at once cause and effect, a principle and a law. The commonsense of the masses never deserts them until demagogues stir them up to gain ends of their own ; that commonsense is based on the verities of social order ; and the social order is the same everywhere, in Moscow as in London, in Geneva as in Calcutta. Given a certain number of families of unequal fortune in any given space, you will see an aristocracy forming under your eyes ; there will be the patricians, the upper classes, and yet other ranks below them. Equality may be a *right*, but no power on earth can convert it into *fact*. It would be a good thing for France if this idea could be popularized. The benefits of political harmony are obvious to the least intelligent classes. Harmony is, as it were, the poetry of order, and order is a matter of vital importance to the working population. And what is order, reduced to its simplest expression, but the agreement of things among themselves—unity, in short ? Architecture, music, and poetry, everything in France, and in France more than in any other country, is based upon this principle ; it is written upon the very foundations of her clear, accurate language, and a language must always be the most infallible index of national character. In the same way you may note that the French popular airs are those most calculated to strike the imagination, the best modulated melodies are taken over by the people ; clearness of thought, the intellectual simplicity of an idea attracts them ; they like the incisive sayings that hold the greatest number of ideas. France is the one country in the world where a little phrase may bring about a great revolution. Whenever the masses have risen, it has been to bring men, affairs, and principles into agreement. No nation has a clearer conception of that idea of unity which should permeate the life of an aristocracy ; possibly no other nation has so intelligent a comprehension of a political necessity ; history will never find her behind the time. France has been led astray many a time, but she is

deluded, woman-like, by generous ideas, by a glow of enthusiasm which at first outstrips sober reason.

So, to begin with, the most striking characteristic of the faubourg is the splendor of its great mansions, its great gardens, and a surrounding quiet in keeping with princely revenues drawn from great estates. And what is this distance set between a class and a whole metropolis but the visible and outward expression of the widely different attitude of mind which must inevitably keep them apart? The position of the head is well defined in every organism. If by any chance a nation allows its head to fall at its feet, it is pretty sure sooner or later to discover that this is a suicidal measure; and since nations have no desire to perish, they set to work at once to grow a new head. If they lack the strength for this, they perish as Rome perished, and Venice, and so many other states.

This distinction between the upper and lower spheres of social activity, emphasized by differences in their manner of living, necessarily implies that in the highest aristocracy there is real worth and some distinguishing merit. In any State, no matter what form of "government" is affected, so soon as the patrician class fails to maintain that complete superiority which is the condition of its existence, it ceases to be a force, and is pulled down at once by the populace. The people always wish to see money, power, and initiative in their leaders, hands, hearts, and heads; they must be the spokesmen, they must represent the intelligence and the glory of the nation. Nations, like women, love strength in those who rule them; they cannot give love without respect; they refuse utterly to obey those of whom they do not stand in awe. An aristocracy fallen into contempt is a *roi fainéant*,* a husband in petticoats; first it ceases to be itself, and then it ceases to be.

And in this way the isolation of the great, the sharply marked distinction in their manner of life, or in a word, the

* Lit.: a lazy king.

general custom of the patrician caste is at once the sign of a real power, and their destruction so soon as that power is lost. The Faubourg Saint-Germain failed to recognize the conditions of its being, while it would still have been easy to perpetuate its existence, and therefore was brought low for a time. The faubourg should have looked the facts fairly in the face, as the English aristocracy did before them; they should have seen that every institution has its climacteric periods, when words lose their old meanings, and ideas reappear in a new guise, and the whole condition of politics wears a changed aspect, while the underlying realities undergo no essential alteration.

These ideas demand further developments which form an essential part of this episode; they are given here both as a succinct statement of the causes and an explanation of the things which happen in the course of the story.

The stateliness of the castles and palaces where nobles dwell; the luxury of the details; the constantly maintained sumptuousness of the furniture; the "atmosphere" in which the fortunate owner of landed estates (a rich man before he was born) lives and moves easily and without friction; the habit of mind which never descends to calculate the petty work-a-day gains of existence; the leisure; the higher education attainable at a much earlier age; and lastly, the aristocratic tradition that makes of him a social force, for which his opponents, by dint of study and a strong will and tenacity of vocation, are scarcely a match—all these things should contribute to form a lofty spirit in a man, possessed of such privileges from his youth up; they should stamp his character with that high self-respect, of which the least consequence is a nobleness of heart in harmony with the noble name that he bears. And in some few families all this is realized. There are noble characters here and there in the faubourg, but they are marked exceptions to a general rule of egoism which has been the ruin of this world within a world. The privileges

above enumerated are the birthright of the French noblesse, as of every patrician efflorescence ever formed on the surface of a nation ; and will continue to be theirs so long as their existence is based upon real estate, or money ; *domaine-sol* (domain of the soil) and *domaine-argent* (domain of money) alike, the only solid bases of an organized society ; but such privileges are held upon the understanding that the patricians must continue to justify their existence. There is a sort of moral fief held on a tenure of service rendered to the sovereign, and here in France the people are undoubtedly the sovereigns nowadays. The times are changed, and so are the weapons. The knight-banneret of old wore a coat of chain-armor and a hauberk ; he could handle a lance well and display his pennon, and no more was required of him ; to-day he is bound to give proof of his intelligence. A stout heart was enough in the days of old ; in our days he is required to have a capacious brain-pan. Skill and knowledge and capital—these three points mark out a social triangle on which the escutcheon of power is blazoned ; our modern aristocracy must take its stand on these.

A fine theorem is as good as a great name. The Rothschilds, the Fuggers of the nineteenth century, are princes *de facto*. A great artist is in reality an oligarch ; he represents a whole century, and almost always he is a law to others. And the art of words, the high-pressure machinery of the writer, the poet's genius, the merchant's steady endurance, the strong will of the statesman who concentrates a thousand dazzling qualities in himself, the general's sword—all these victories, in short, which a single individual will win, that he may tower above the rest of the world, the patrician class is now bound to win and keep exclusively. They must head the new forces as they once headed the material forces ; how should they keep the position unless they are worthy of it ? How, unless they are the soul and brain of a nation, shall they set its hand moving ? How lead a people without the

power of command? And what is the marshal's baton without the innate power of the captain in the man who wields it? The Faubourg Saint-Germain took to playing with batons, and fancied that all the power was in its hands. It inverted the terms of the proposition which called it into existence. And instead of flinging away the insignia which offended the people, and quietly grasping the power, it allowed the bourgeoisie to seize the authority, clung with fatal obstinacy to its shadow, and over and over again forgot the laws which a minority must observe if it would live. When an aristocracy is scarce a thousandth part of the body social, it is bound to-day, as of old, to multiply its points of action, so as to counterbalance the weight of the masses in a great crisis. And in our days those means of action must be living forces, and not historical memories.

In France, unluckily, the noblesse were still so puffed up with the notion of their ancient and vanished power, that it was difficult to contend against a kind of innate presumption in themselves. Perhaps this is a national defect. The Frenchman is less given than any one else to undervalue himself; it comes natural to him to go from his degree to the one above it; and while it is a rare thing for him to pity the unfortunates over whose heads he rises, he always groans in spirit to see so many fortunate people above him. He is very far from heartless, but too often he prefers to listen to his intellect. The national instinct which brings the Frenchman to the front, the vanity that wastes his substance, is as much a dominant passion as thrift in the Dutch. For three centuries it swayed the noblesse, who, in this respect, were certainly preëminently French. The scion of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, beholding his material superiority, was fully persuaded of his intellectual superiority. And everything contributed to confirm him in his belief; for ever since the Faubourg Saint-Germain existed at all—which is to say, ever since Versailles ceased to be the royal residence—the faubourg, with some few gaps in

continuity, was always backed up by the central power, which in France seldom fails to support that side. Thence its downfall in 1830.

At that time the party of the Faubourg Saint-Germain was rather like an army without a base of operations. It had utterly failed to take advantage of the peace to plant itself in the heart of the nation. It sinned for want of learning its lesson, and through an utter incapability of regarding its interests as a whole. A future certainty was sacrificed to a doubtful present gain. This blunder in policy may perhaps be attributed to the following cause :

The class-isolation so strenuously kept up by the noblesse brought about fatal results during the last forty years ; even caste-patriotism was extinguished by it, and rivalry fostered among themselves. When the French noblesse of other times were rich and powerful, the nobles (*gentilhommes*) could choose their chiefs and obey them in the hour of danger. As their power diminished, they grew less amenable to discipline ; and as in the last days of the Byzantine Empire, every one wished to be emperor. They mistook their uniform weakness for uniform strength.

Each family ruined by the Revolution and the abolition of the law of primogeniture thought only of itself, and not at all of the great family of its caste. It seemed to them that as each individual grew rich, the party as a whole would gain in strength. And herein lay their mistake. Money, likewise, is only the outward and visible sign of power. All these families were made up of persons who preserved a high tradition of courtesy, of true graciousness of life, of refined speech, with a family pride, and a squeamish sense of *noblesse oblige** which suited well with the kind of life they led ; a life wholly filled with occupations which become contemptible so soon as they cease to be accessories and take the chief place in existence. There was a certain intrinsic merit in all these

* The obligations of a noble's life.

people, out the merit was on the surface, and none of them were worth their face-value.

Not a single one among those families had courage to ask itself the question, "Are we strong enough for the responsibility of power?" They were cast on the top, like the lawyers of 1830; and instead of taking the patron's place, like a great man, the Faubourg Saint-Germain showed itself greedy as an upstart. The most intelligent nation in the world perceived clearly that the restored nobles were organizing everything for their own particular benefit. From that day the noblesse was doomed. The Faubourg Saint-Germain tried to be an aristocracy when it could only be an oligarchy—two very different systems, as any man may see for himself if he gives an intelligent perusal to the list of the patronymics of the House of Peers.

The King's Government certainly meant well; but the maxim that the people must be made to *will* everything, even their own welfare, was pretty constantly forgotten, nor did they bear in mind that La France is a woman and capricious, and must be happy or chastised at her own good pleasure. If there had been many dukes like the Duc de Laval, whose modesty made him worthy of the name he bore, the elder branch would have been as securely seated on the throne as the House of Hanover at this day.

In 1814 the noblesse of France were called upon to assert their superiority over the most aristocratic bourgeoisie in the most feminine of all countries, to take the lead in the most highly educated epoch the world had yet seen. And this was even more notably the case in 1820. The Faubourg Saint-Germain might very easily have led and amused the middle classes in days when people's heads were turned with distinctions, and art and science were all the rage. But the narrow-minded leaders of a time of great intellectual progress all of them detested art and science. They had not even the wit to present religion in attractive colors, though they needed

its support. While Lamartine, Lamennais, Montalembert, and other writers were putting new life and elevation into men's ideas of religion, and gilding it with poetry, these bunglers in the Government chose to make the harshness of their creed felt all over the country. Never was nation in a more tractable humor; La France, like a tired woman, was ready to agree to anything; never was mismanagement so clumsy; and La France, like a woman, would have forgiven wrongs more easily than bungling.

If the noblesse meant to reinstate themselves, the better to found a strong oligarchy, they should have honestly and diligently searched their houses for men of the stamp that Napoleon used; they should have turned themselves inside out to see if peradventure there was a Constitutionalist Richelieu lurking in the entrails of the faubourg; and if that genius was not forthcoming from among them, they should have set out to find him, even in the fireless garret where he might happen to be perishing of cold; they should have assimilated him, as the English House of Lords continually assimilates aristocrats made by chance; and finally ordered him to be ruthless, to lop away the old wood, and cut the tree down to the living shoots. But, in the first place, the great system of English Toryism was far too large for narrow minds; the importation required time, and in France a tardy success is no better than a fiasco. So far, moreover, from adopting a policy of redemption, and looking for new forces where God puts them, these petty great folk took a dislike to any capacity that did not issue from their midst; and, lastly, instead of growing young again, the Faubourg Saint-Germain grew positively older.

Etiquette, not an institution of primary necessity, might have been maintained if it had appeared only on state occasions, but as it was, there was a daily wrangle over precedence; it ceased to be a matter of art or Court ceremonial, it became a question of power. And if from the outset the Crown lacked

an adviser equal to so great a crisis, the aristocracy was still more lacking in a sense of its wider interests, an instinct which might have supplied the deficiency. They stood nice about M. de Talleyrand's marriage, when M. de Talleyrand was the one man among them with the steel-encompassed brains that can forge a new political system and begin a new career of glory for a nation. The faubourg scoffed at a minister if he was not gentle born, and produced no one of gentle birth that was fit to be a minister. There were plenty of nobles fitted to serve their country by raising the dignity of justices of the peace, by improving the land, by opening out roads and canals, and taking an active and leading part as country gentlemen; but these had sold their estates to gamble on the Stock Exchange. Again, the faubourg might have absorbed the energetic men among the bourgeoisie, and opened their ranks to the ambition which was undermining authority; they preferred instead to fight, and to fight unarmed, for of all that they once possessed there was nothing left but tradition. For their misfortune there was just precisely enough of their former wealth left them as a class to keep up their bitter pride. They were content with their past. Not one of them seriously thought of bidding the son of the house take up arms from the pile of weapons which the nineteenth century flings down in the market-place. Young men, shut out from office, were dancing at MADAME'S balls, while they should have been doing the work done under the Republic and the Empire by young, conscientious, harmlessly employed energies. It was their place to carry out at Paris the programme which their seniors should have been following in the country. The heads of houses might have won back recognition of their titles by unremitting attention to local interests, by falling in with the spirit of the age, by recasting their order to suit the taste of the times.

But, pent up together in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where the spirit of the ancient Court and traditions of bygone feuds

between the nobles and the Crown still lingered on, the aristocracy was not whole-hearted in its allegiance to the Tuileries, and so much the more easily defeated because it was concentrated in the Chamber of Peers, and badly organized even there. If the noblesse had woven themselves into a network over the country, they could have held their own; but cooped up in their faubourg, with their backs against the château, or spread at full length over the budget, a single blow cut the thread of a fast-expiring life, and a petty, smug-faced lawyer came forward with the axe. In spite of M. Royer-Collard's admirable discourse, the hereditary peerage and law of entail fell before the lampoons of a man who made it a boast that he had adroitly argued some few heads out of the executioner's clutches, and now forsooth must clumsily proceed to the slaying of old institutions.

There are examples and lessons for the future in all this. For if there were not still a future before the French aristocracy, there would be no need to do more than find a suitable sarcophagus; it were something pitilessly cruel to burn the dead body of it with fire of Tophet. But though the surgeon's scalpel is ruthless, it sometimes gives back life to a dying man; and the Faubourg Saint-Germain may wax more powerful under persecution than in its day of triumph, if it but chooses to organize itself under a leader.

And now it is easy to give a summary of this semi-political survey. The wish to reëstablish a large fortune was uppermost in every one's mind; a lack of broad views, and a mass of small defects, a real need of religion as a political factor, combined with a thirst for pleasure which damaged the cause of religion and necessitated a good deal of hypocrisy; a certain attitude of protest on the part of loftier and clearer-sighted men who set their faces against Court jealousies; and the disaffection of the provincial families, who often came of purer descent than the nobles of the Court which alienated them from itself—all these things combined to bring about a most

discordant state of things in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. It was neither compact in its organization, nor consequent in its action; neither completely moral, nor frankly dissolute; it did not corrupt, nor was it corrupted; it would neither wholly abandon the disputed points which damaged its cause, nor yet adopt the policy that might have saved it. In short, however effete individuals might be, the party as a whole was none the less armed with all the great principles which lie at the roots of national existence. What was there in the faubourg that it should perish in its strength?

It was very hard to please in the choice of candidates; the faubourg had good taste, it was scornfully fastidious, yet there was nothing very glorious nor chivalrous truly about its fall.

In the Emigration of 1789 there were some traces of a loftier feeling; but in the Emigration of 1830 from Paris into the country there was nothing discernible but self-interest. A few famous men of letters, a few oratorical triumphs in the Chambers, M. de Talleyrand's attitude in the Congress, the taking of Algiers, and not a few names that found their way from the battlefield into the pages of history—all these things were so many examples set before the French noblesse to show that it was still open to them to take their part in the national existence, and to win recognition of their claims, if, indeed, they could condescend thus far. In every living organism the work of bringing the whole into harmony within itself is always going on. If a man is indolent, the indolence shows itself in everything that he does; and, in the same manner, the general spirit of a class is pretty plainly manifested in the face it turns on the world, and the soul informs the body.

The women of the Restoration displayed neither the proud disregard of public opinion shown by the Court ladies of olden time in their wantonness nor yet the simple grandeur of the tardy virtues by which they expiated their sins and shed so bright a glory about their names. There was nothing either

very frivolous or very serious about the woman of the Restoration. She was hypocritical as a rule in her passion, and compounded, so to speak, with its pleasures. Some few families led the domestic life of the Duchesse d'Orléans, whose conubial couch was exhibited so absurdly to visitors at the Palais Royal. Two or three kept up the traditions of the Regency, filling cleverer women with something like disgust. The great lady of the new school exercised no influence at all over the manners of the time; and yet she might have done much. She might, at worst, have presented as dignified a spectacle as Englishwomen of the same rank. But she hesitated feebly among old precedents, became a bigot by force of circumstances, and allowed nothing of herself to appear, not even her better qualities.

Not one among the Frenchwomen of that day had the ability to create a salon whither leaders of fashion might come to take lessons in taste and elegance. Their voices, which once laid down the law to literature, that living expression of a time, now counted absolutely for naught. Now when a literature lacks a general system, it fails to shape a body for itself, and dies out with its period.

When in a nation at any time there is a people apart thus constituted, the historian is pretty certain to find some representative figure, some central personage, who embodies the qualities and the defects of the whole party to which he belongs; there is Coligny, for instance, among the Huguenots, the Coadjuteur in the time of the Fronde, the Maréchal de Richelieu under Louis XV., Danton during the Terror. It is in the nature of things that the man should be identified with the company in which history finds him. How is it possible to lead a party without conforming to its ideas? or to shine in any epoch unless a man represents the ideas of his time? The wise and prudent head of a party is continually obliged to bow to the prejudices and follies of its rear; and this is the cause of actions for which he is afterward criticised by this or

that historian sitting at a safer distance from terrific popular explosions, coolly judging the passion and ferment without which the great struggles of the world could not be carried on at all. And if this is true of the Historical Comedy of the centuries, it is equally true in a more restricted sphere in the detached scenes of the national drama known as the "Manners of the Age."

At the beginning of that ephemeral life led by the Faubourg Saint-Germain under the Restoration, to which, if there is any truth in the above reflections, they failed to give stability, the most perfect type of the aristocratic caste in its weakness and strength, its greatness and littleness, might have been found for a brief space in a young married woman who belonged to it. This was a woman artificially educated, but in reality ignorant; a woman whose instincts and feelings were lofty, while the thought which should have controlled them was wanting. She squandered the wealth of her nature in obedience to social conventions; she was ready to brave society, yet she hesitated till her scruples degenerated into artifice. With more willfulness than real force of character, impressionable rather than enthusiastic, gifted with more brain than heart; she was supremely a woman, supremely a coquette, and above all things a Parisienne, loving a brilliant life and gayety, reflecting never, or too late; imprudent to the verge of poetry, and humble in the depths of her heart, in spite of her charming insolence. Like some straight-growing reed, she made a show of independence; yet, like the reed, she was ready to bend to a strong hand. She talked much of religion, and had it not at heart, though she was prepared to find in it a solution of her life. How explain a creature so complex? Capable of heroism, yet sinking unconsciously from heroic heights to utter a spiteful word; young and sweet-natured, not so much old at heart as aged by the maxims of those about her; versed in a selfish philosophy in which she was all un-

practiced, she had all the vices of a courtier, all the nobleness of developing womanhood. She trusted nothing and no one, yet there were times when she quitted her skeptical attitude for a submissive credulity.

How should any portrait be anything but incomplete of her, in whom the play of swiftly changing color made discord only to produce a poetic confusion? for in her there shone a divine brightness, a radiance of youth that blended all her bewildering characteristics in a certain completeness and unity informed by her charm. Nothing was feigned. The passion or semi-passion, the ineffectual high aspirations, the actual pettiness, the coolness of sentiment and warmth of impulse, were all spontaneous and unaffected, and as much the outcome of her own position as of the position of the aristocracy to which she belonged. She was wholly self-contained; she held herself proudly above the world and beneath the shelter of her name. There was something of the egoism of Medea in her life, as in the life of the aristocracy that lay a-dying, and would not so much as raise itself or stretch out a hand to any political physician; so well aware of its feebleness, or so conscious that it was already dust, that it refused to touch or be touched.

The Duchesse de Langeais (for that was her name) had been married for about four years when the Restoration was finally consummated, which is to say, in 1816. By that time the revolution of the Hundred Days had let in the light on the mind of Louis XVIII. In spite of his surroundings, he comprehended the situation and the age in which he was living; and it was only later, when this Louis XI., without the axe, lay stricken down by disease, that those about him got the upper hand. The Duchesse de Langeais, a Navarreins by birth, came of a ducal house which had made a point of never marrying below its rank since the reign of Louis XIV. Every daughter of the house had the right and must sooner or later take a *tabouret* (seat) at Court. So, Antoinette de Navar-

reins, at the age of eighteen, came out of the profound solitude in which her girlhood had been spent to marry the Duc de Langeais' eldest son. The two families at that time were living quite out of the world; but after the invasion of France, the return of the Bourbons seemed to every Royalist mind the only possible way of putting an end to the miseries of the war.

The Ducs de Navarreins and de Langeais had been faithful throughout to the exiled princes, nobly resisting all the temptations of glory under the Empire. Under the circumstances they naturally followed out the old family policy; and Mlle. Antoinette, a beautiful and portionless girl, was married to M. le Marquis de Langeais only a few months before the death of the duke his father.

After the return of the Bourbons, the families resumed their rank, offices, and dignity at Court; once more they entered public life, from which hitherto they had held aloof, and took their place high on the sun-lit summits of the new political world. In that time of general baseness and sham political conversions, the public conscience was glad to recognize the unstained loyalty of the two houses, and a consistency in political and private life for which all parties involuntarily respected them. But, unfortunately, as so often happens in a time of transition, the most disinterested persons, the men whose loftiness of view and wise principles would have gained the confidence of the French nation and led them to believe in the generosity of a novel and spirited policy; these men, to repeat, were taken out of affairs, and public business was allowed to fall into the hands of others, who found it to their interest to push principles to their extreme consequences by way of proving their devotion.

The families of Langeais and Navarreins remained about the Court, condemned to perform the duties required by Court ceremonial amid the reproaches and sneers of the Liberal party. They were accused of gorging themselves with

riches and honors, and all the while their family estates were no larger than before, and liberal allowances from the civil list were wholly expended in keeping up the state necessary for any European government, even if it be a republic.

In 1818, M. le Duc de Langeais commanded a division of the army, and the duchess held a post about one of the princesses, in virtue of which she was free to live in Paris and apart from her husband without scandal. The duke, moreover, beside his military duties, had a place at Court, to which he came during his term of waiting, leaving his major-general in command. The duke and duchess were leading lives entirely apart, separated both in fact and feeling, the world none the wiser. Their marriage of convention shared the fate of nearly all family arrangements of the kind. Two more antipathetic dispositions could not well have been found; they were brought together; they jarred upon each other; there was soreness on either side; thus they were divided once for all. Then they went their separate ways, with a due regard for appearances. The Duc de Langeais, by nature as methodical as the Chevalier de Folard, gave himself up methodically to his own tastes and amusements, and left his wife at liberty to do as she pleased so soon as he felt sure of her character. He recognized in her a spirit preëminently proud, a cold heart, a profound submissiveness to the usages of the world, and a youthful loyalty. Under the eyes of great relations, with the light of a prudish and bigoted Court turned full upon the duchess, his honor was safe.

So the duke calmly did as the great lords of the eighteenth century did before him, and left a young wife of two-and-twenty to her own devices. He had deeply offended that wife, and in her nature there was one appalling characteristic—she would never forgive an offense when woman's vanity and self-love, with all that was best in her nature, perhaps, had been slighted, wounded in secret. Insult and injury in the face of the world a woman loves to forget; there is a way

open to her of showing herself great; she is a woman in her forgiveness; but a secret offense women never pardon; for secret baseness, as for hidden virtues and hidden love, they have no kindness.

This was Mme. la Duchesse de Langeais' real position, unknown to the world. She herself did not reflect upon it. It was the time of the rejoicings over the Duc de Berri's marriage. The Court and the faubourg roused itself from its listlessness and reserve. This was the real beginning of that unheard-of splendor which the Government of the Restoration carried too far. At that time the duchess, whether for reasons of her own, or from vanity, never appeared in public without a following of women equally distinguished by name and fortune. As queen of fashion she had her *dames d'ateurs*, her ladies, who modeled their manner and their wit on hers. They had been cleverly chosen. None of her satellites belonged to the inmost Court circle, not to the highest level of the Faubourg Saint-Germain; but they had set their minds upon admission to those inner sanctuaries. Being as yet simple dominations, they wished to rise to the neighborhood of the throne, and mingle with the seraphic powers in the high sphere known as "le petit château." Thus surrounded, the duchess' position was stronger and more commanding and secure. Her "ladies" defended her character and helped her to play her detestable part of a woman of fashion. She could laugh at men at her ease, play with fire, receive the homage on which the feminine nature is nourished, and remain mistress of herself.

At Paris, in the highest society of all, a woman is a woman still; she lives on incense, adulation, and honors. No beauty, however undoubted, no face, however fair, is anything without admiration. Flattery and a lover are proofs of power. And what is power without recognition? Nothing. If the prettiest of women were left alone in a corner of a drawing-room, she would droop. Put her in the very centre and sum-

mit of socia. grandeur, she will at once aspire to reign over all hearts—often because it is out of her power to be the happy queen of one. Dress and manner and coquetry are all meant to please one of the poorest creatures extant—the brainless coxcomb, whose handsome face is his sole merit; it was for such as these that women threw themselves away. The gilded wooden idols of the Restoration, for they were neither more nor less, had neither the antecedents of the *petits maitres* (little masters) of the time of the Fronde, nor the rough sterling worth of Napoleon's heroes, not the wit and fine manners of their grandsires; but something of all three they meant to be without any trouble to themselves. Brave they were, like all young Frenchmen; ability they possessed, no doubt, if they had had a chance of proving it, but their places were filled up by the old worn-out men, who kept them in leading strings. It was a day of small things, a cold prosaic era. Perhaps it takes a long time for a Restoration to become a Monarchy.

For the past eighteen months the Duchesse de Langeais had been leading this empty life, filled with balls and subsequent visits, objectless triumphs, and the transient loves that spring up and die in an evening's space. All eyes were turned on her when she entered a room; she reaped her harvest of flatteries and some few words of warmer admiration, which she encouraged by a gesture or a glance, but never suffered to penetrate deeper than the skin. Her tone and bearing and everything else about her imposed her will upon others. Her life was a sort of fever of vanity and perpetual enjoyment, which turned her head. She was daring enough in conversation; she would listen to anything, corrupting the surface, as it were, of her heart. Yet, when she returned home, she often blushed at the story that had made her laugh; at the scandalous tale that supplied the details, on the strength of which she analyzed the love that she had never known, and marked the subtle distinctions of modern passion, not without comment on the part

of complacent hypocrites. For women know how to say everything among themselves, and more of them are ruined by each other than corrupted by men.

There came a moment when she discerned that not until a woman is loved will the world fully recognize her beauty and her wit. What does a husband prove? Simply that a girl or woman was endowed with wealth, or well brought up; that her mother managed cleverly; that in some way she satisfied a man's ambitions. A lover constantly bears witness to her personal perfections. Then followed the discovery, still in Mme. de Langeais' early womanhood, that it was possible to be loved without committing herself, without permission, without vouchsafing any satisfaction beyond the most meagre dues. There was more than one demure feminine hypocrite to instruct her in the art of playing such dangerous comedies.

So the duchess had her court, and the number of her adorers and courtiers guaranteed her virtue. She was amiable and fascinating; she flirted till the ball or the evening's gayety was at an end. Then the curtain dropped. She was cold, indifferent, self-contained again, till the next day brought its renewed sensations, superficial as before. Two or three men were completely deceived, and fell in love in earnest. She laughed at them, she was utterly insensible. "I am loved!" she told herself. "He loves me!" The certainty sufficed her. It is enough for the miser to know that his every whim might be fulfilled if he chose; so it was with the duchess, and perhaps she did not even go so far as to form a wish.

One evening she chanced to be at the house of an intimate friend, Mme. la Vicomtesse de Fontaine, one of the humble rivals who cordially detested her, and went with her everywhere. In a "friendship" of this sort both sides are on their guard, and never lay their armor aside; confidences are ingeniously indiscreet, and not infrequently treacherous. Mme. de Langeais had distributed her little patronizing, friendly, or freezing bows, with the air natural to a woman who knows the worth

of her smiles, when her eyes fell upon a total stranger. Something in the man's large gravity of aspect startled her, and, with a feeling almost like dread, she turned to Mme. de Maufigneuse with: "Who is the new-comer, dear?"

"Some one that you have heard of, no doubt. The Marquis de Montriveau."

"Oh! is it he?"

She took up her eyeglass and submitted him to a very insolent scrutiny, as if he had been a picture meant to receive glances, not to return them.

"Do introduce him; he ought to be interesting."

"Nobody more tiresome and dull, dear. But he is the fashion."

M. Armand de Montriveau, at that moment all unwittingly the object of general curiosity, better deserved attention than any of the idols that Paris needs must set up to worship for a brief space, for the city is vexed by periodical fits of craving, a passion for infatuation and sham enthusiasm, which must be satisfied. The marquis was the only son of General de Montriveau, one of the *ci-devants* who served the Republic nobly, and fell by Joubert's side at Novi. Bonaparte had placed his son at the school at Châlons, with the orphans of other generals who fell on the battlefield, leaving their children under the protection of the Republic. Armand de Montriveau left school with his way to make, entered the artillery, and had only reached a major's rank at the time of the Fontainebleau disaster. In his section of the service the chances of advancement were not many. There are fewer officers, in the first place, among the gunners than in any other corps; and in the second place, the feeling in the artillery was decidedly Liberal, not to say Republican; and the Emperor, feeling little confidence in a body of highly educated men who were apt to think for themselves, gave promotion grudgingly in the service. In the artillery, accordingly, the general

rule of the army did not apply ; the commanding officers were not invariably the most remarkable men in their department, because there was less to be feared from mediocrities. The artillery was a separate corps in those days, and only came under Napoleon in action.

Beside these general causes, other reasons, inherent in Armand de Montriveau's character, were sufficient in themselves to account for his tardy promotion. He was alone in the world. He had been thrown at the age of twenty into the whirlwind of men directed by Napoleon ; his interests were bounded by himself, any day he might lose his life ; it became a habit of mind with him to live by his own self-respect and the consciousness that he had done his duty. Like all shy men, he was habitually silent ; but his shyness sprang by no means from timidity ; it was a kind of modesty in him ; he found any demonstration of vanity intolerable. There was no sort of swagger about his fearlessness in action ; nothing escaped his eyes ; he could give sensible advice to his chums with unshaken coolness ; he could go under fire, and dodge upon occasion to avoid bullets. He was kindly ; but his expression was haughty and stern, and his face gained him this character. In everything he was rigorous as arithmetic ; he never permitted the slightest deviation from duty on any plausible pretext, nor blinked the consequences of a fact. He would lend himself to nothing of which he was ashamed ; he never asked anything for himself ; in short, Armand de Montriveau was one of many great men unknown to fame, and philosophical enough to despise it ; living without attaching themselves to life, because they have not found their opportunity of developing to the full their power to do and feel.

People were afraid of Montriveau ; they respected him, but he was not very popular. Men may indeed allow you to rise above them, but to decline to descend as low as they is the one unpardonable sin. In their feeling toward loftier natures, there is a trace of hate and fear. Too much honor with them

implies censure of themselves, a thing forgiven neither to the living nor to the dead.

After the Emperor's farewell at Fontainebleau, Montriveau, noble though he was, was put on half-pay. Perhaps the heads of the War Office took fright at uncompromising uprightness worthy of antiquity, or perhaps it was known that he felt bound by his oath to the imperial eagle. During the Hundred Days he was made a colonel of the Guard, and left on the field of Waterloo. His wounds kept him in Belgium; he was not present at the disbanding of the Army of the Loire, but the King's government declined to recognize promotion made during the Hundred Days, and Armand de Montriveau left France.

An adventurous spirit, a loftiness of thought hitherto satisfied by the hazards of war, drove him on an exploring expedition through Upper Egypt; his sanity of impulse directed his enthusiasm to a project of great importance, he turned his attention to that unexplored Central Africa which occupies the learned of to-day. The scientific expedition was long and unfortunate. He had made a valuable collection of notes bearing on various geographical and commercial problems, of which solutions are still eagerly sought; and succeeded, after surmounting many obstacles, in reaching the heart of the continent, when he was betrayed into the hands of a hostile native tribe. Then, stripped of all that he had, for two years he led a wandering life in the desert, the slave of savages, threatened with death at every moment, and more cruelly treated than a dumb animal in the power of pitiless children. Physical strength, and a mind braced to endurance, enabled him to survive the horrors of that captivity; but his miraculous escape well-nigh exhausted his energies. When he reached the French colony at Senegal, a half-dead fugitive covered with rags, his memories of his former life were dim and shapeless. The great sacrifices made in his travels were all forgotten like his studies of African dialects, his discoveries, and observations. One

story will give an idea of all that he passed through. Once for several days the children of the sheikh of the tribe amused themselves by putting him up for a mark and flinging horses' knuckle-bones at his head.

Montriveau came back to Paris in 1818 a ruined man. He had no interest, and wished for none. He would have died twenty times over sooner than ask a favor of any one; he would not even press the recognition of his claims. Adversity and hardship had developed his energy even in trifles, while the habit of preserving his self-respect before that spiritual self which we call conscience led him to attach consequence to the most apparently trivial actions. His merits and adventures became known, however, through his acquaintances, among the principal men of science in Paris, and some few well-read military men. The incidents of his slavery and subsequent escape bore witness to a courage, intelligence, and coolness which won him celebrity without his knowledge, and that transient fame of which Paris salons are lavish, though the artist that fain would keep it must make untold efforts.

Montriveau's position suddenly changed toward the end of that year. He had been a poor man, he was now rich; or, externally at any rate, he had all the advantages of wealth. The King's government, trying to attach capable men to itself and to strengthen the army, made concessions about that time to Napoleon's old officers if their known loyalty and character offered guarantees of fidelity. M. de Montriveau's name once more appeared in the army list with the rank of colonel; he received his arrears of pay and passed into the Guards. All these favors, one after another, came to seek the Marquis de Montriveau; he had asked for nothing, however small. Friends had taken the steps for him which he would have refused to take for himself.

After this, his habits were modified all at once; contrary to his custom, he went into society. He was well received, everywhere he met with great deference and respect. He

seemed to have found some end in life ; but everything passed within the man, there were no external signs ; in society he was silent and cold, and wore a grave, reserved face. His social success was great, precisely because he stood out in such strong contrast to the conventional facts which line the walls of Paris salons. He was, indeed, something quite new there. Terse of speech, like a hermit or a savage, his shyness was thought to be haughtiness, and people were greatly taken with it. He was something strange and great. Women generally were so much the more smitten with this original person because he was not to be caught by their flatteries, however adroit, nor by the wiles with which they circumvent the strongest men and corrode the steel temper. Their Parisian grimaces were lost upon M. de Montriveau ; his nature only responded to the sonorous vibration of lofty thought and feeling. And he would very promptly have been dropped but for the romance that hung about his adventures and his life ; but for the men who cried him up behind his back ; but for a woman who looked for a triumph for her vanity, the woman who was to fill his thoughts.

For these reasons the Duchesse de Langeais' curiosity was no less lively than natural. Chance had so ordered it that her interest in the man before her had been aroused only the day before, when she heard the story of one of M. de Montriveau's adventures, a story calculated to make the strongest impression upon a woman's ever-changing fancy.

During M. de Montriveau's voyage of discovery to the sources of the Nile, he had had an argument with one of his guides, surely the most extraordinary debate in the annals of travel. The district that he wished to explore could only be reached on foot across a tract of desert. Only one of his guides knew the way ; no traveler had penetrated before into that part of the country, where the undaunted officer hoped to find a solution of several scientific problems. In spite of the representations made to him by the guide and the older men

of the place, he started upon the formidable journey. Summoning up courage, already highly strung by the prospect of dreadful difficulties, he set out in the morning.

The loose sand shifted under his feet at every step; and when, at the end of a long day's march, he lay down to sleep on the ground, he had never been so tired in his life. He knew, however, that he must be up and on his way before dawn next day, and his guide assured him that they should reach the end of their journey toward noon. That promise kept up his courage and gave him new strength. In spite of his sufferings, he continued his march, with some blasphemings against science; he was ashamed to complain to his guide, and kept his pain to himself. After marching for a third of the day, he felt his strength failing, his feet were bleeding, he asked if they should reach the place soon. "In an hour's time," said the guide. Armand braced himself for another hour's march, and they went on.

The hour slipped by; he could not so much as see against the sky the palm-trees and crests of hill that should tell of the end of the journey near at hand; the horizon-line of sand was vast as the circle of the open sea.

He came to a stand, refused to go farther, and threatened the guide—he had deceived him, murdered him; tears of rage and weariness flowed over his fevered cheeks; he was bowed down with fatigue upon fatigue, his throat seemed to be glued by the desert thirst. The guide meanwhile stood motionless, listening to these complaints with an ironical expression, studying the while, with the apparent indifference of an Oriental, the scarcely perceptible indications in the lay of the sands, which looked almost black in its reflections, like burnished gold.

"I have made a mistake," he remarked coolly. "I could not make out the track, it is so long since I came this way; we are most surely on it now, but we must push on for two hours longer."

"The man is right," thought M. de Montriveau.

So he went on again, struggling to follow the pitiless native. It seemed as if he were bound to his guide by some cord like the invisible bond between the condemned man and the headsmen. But the two hours went by, Montriveau had spent his last drops of energy, and the sky-line was a blank, there were no palm-trees, no hills. He could neither cry out nor groan, he lay down on the sand to die, but his eyes would have frightened the boldest; something in his face seemed to say that he would not die alone. His guide, like a very fiend, gave him back a cool glance like a man that knows his power, left him to lie there, and kept at a safe distance out of reach of his desperate victim. At last M. Montriveau recovered strength enough for a last curse. The guide came nearer, silenced him with a steady look, and said: "Was it not your own will to go where I am taking you, in spite of us all? You say that I have lied to you. If I had not, you would not be even here. Do you want the truth? Here it is: *We have still another five hours' march before us, and we cannot go back.* Sound yourself; if you have not courage enough, here is my dagger."

Startled by this dreadful knowledge of pain and human strength, M. de Montriveau would not be behind a savage; he drew a fresh stock of courage from his pride as a European, rose to his feet, and followed his guide. The five hours were at an end, and still M. de Montriveau saw nothing, he turned his failing eyes upon his guide; but the Nubian hoisted him on his shoulders, and showed him a wide pool of water with greenness all about it, and a noble forest lighted up by the sunset. It lay only a hundred paces away; a vast ledge of granite hid the glorious landscape. It seemed to Armand that he had taken a new lease of life. His guide, that giant in courage and intelligence, finished his work of devotion by carrying him across the hot, slippery, scarcely discernible track on the granite. Behind him lay the hell of burning

"SOUND YOURSELF; IF YOU HAVE NOT COURAGE ENOUGH
HERE IS MY DAGGER."



sand, before him the earthly paradise of the most beautiful oasis in the desert.

The duchess, struck from the first by the appearance of this romantic figure, was even more impressed when she learned that this was that Marquis de Montriveau of whom she had dreamed during the night. She had been with him among the hot desert sands, he had been the companion of her nightmare wanderings; for such a woman was not this a delightful presage of a new interest in her life? And never was a man's exterior a better exponent of his character; never were curious glances so well justified. The principal characteristic of his great, square-hewn head was the thick, luxuriant black hair which framed his face, and gave him a strikingly close resemblance to General Kléber; and the likeness still held good in the vigorous forehead, in the outlines of his face, the quiet fearlessness of his eyes, and a kind of fiery vehemence expressed by strongly marked features. He was short, deep-chested, and muscular as a lion. There was something of the despot about him, and an indescribable suggestion of the security of strength in his gait, bearing, and slightest movement. He seemed to know that his will was irresistible, perhaps because he willed only that which was right. And yet, like all really strong men, he was mild of speech, simple in his manners, and kindly natured; although it seemed as if, in the stress of a great crisis, all these finer qualities must disappear, and the man would show himself implacable, unshaken in his resolve, terrific in action. There was a certain drawing in of the inner line of the lips which, to a close observer, indicated an ironical bent.

The Duchesse de Langeais, realizing that a fleeting glory was to be won by such a conquest, made up her mind to gain a lover in Armand de Montriveau during the brief interval before the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse brought him to be introduced. She would prefer him above the others; she would attach him to herself, display all her powers of coquetry for

him. It was a fancy, such a mere duchess' whim as furnished a Lope or a Calderon with the plot of the "Dog in the Manger." She would not suffer another woman to engross him; but she had not the remotest intention of being his.

Nature had given the duchess every qualification for the part of coquette, and education had perfected her. Women envied her, and men fell in love with her, not without reason. Nothing that can inspire love, justify it, and give it lasting empire was wanting in her. Her style of beauty, her manner, her voice, her bearing, all combined to give her that instinctive coquetry which seems to be the consciousness of power. Her shape was graceful; perhaps there was a trace of self-consciousness in her changes of movement, the one affectation that could be laid to her charge; but everything about her was a part of her personality, from her least little gesture to the peculiar turn of her phrases, the demure glance of her eyes. Her great lady's grace, her most striking characteristic, had not destroyed the very French quick mobility of her person. There was an extraordinary fascination in her swift, incessant changes of attitude. She seemed as if she surely would be a most delicious mistress when her corset and the encumbering costume of her part was laid aside. All the rapture of love surely was latent in the freedom of her expressive glances, in her caressing tones, in the charm of her words. She gave glimpses of the high-born courtesan within her, vainly protesting against the creeds of the duchess.

You might sit near her through an evening, she would be gay and melancholy in turn, and her gayety, like her sadness, seemed spontaneous. She could be gracious, disdainful, insolent, or confiding at will. Her apparent good-nature was real; she had no temptation to descend to malignity. But at each moment her mood changed; she was full of confidence or craft; her moving tenderness would give place to a heart-breaking hardness and insensibility. Yet how paint her as she was, without bringing together all the extremes of femi-

nine nature? In a word, the duchess was anything that she wished to be or to seem. Her face was slightly too long. There was a grace in it, and a certain thinness and fineness that recalled the portraits of the Middle Ages. Her skin was white, with a faint rose tint. Everything about her erred, as it were, by an excess of delicacy.

M. de Montriveau willingly consented to be introduced to the Duchesse de Langeais ; and she, after the manner of persons whose sensitive taste leads them to avoid banalities, refrained from overwhelming him with questions and compliments. She received him with a gracious deference which could not fail to flatter a man of more than ordinary powers, for the fact that a man rises above the ordinary level implies that he possesses something of that tact which makes women quick to read feeling. If the duchess showed any curiosity, it was by her glances ; her compliments were conveyed in her manner ; there was a winning grace displayed in her words, a subtle suggestion of a desire to please which she of all women knew the art of manifesting. Yet her whole conversation was but, in a manner, the body of the letter ; the postscript with the principal thought in it was still to come. After half an hour spent in ordinary chat, in which the words gained all their value from her tone and smiles, M. de Montriveau was about to retire discreetly, when the duchess stopped him with an expressive gesture.

“I do not know, monsieur, whether these few minutes during which I have had the pleasure of talking to you proved so sufficiently attractive that I may venture to ask you to call upon me ; I am afraid that it may be very selfish of me to wish to have you all to myself. If I should be so fortunate as to find that my house is agreeable to you, you will always find me at home in the evening until ten o’clock.”

The invitation was given with such irresistible grace that M. de Montriveau could not refuse to accept it. When he fell back again among the groups of men gathered at a dis-

tance from the women, his friends congratulated him, half laughingly, half in earnest, on the extraordinary reception vouchsafed him by the Duchesse de Langeais. The difficult and brilliant conquest had been made beyond a doubt, and the glory of it was reserved for the Artillery of the Guard. It is easy to imagine the jests, good and bad, when this topic had once been started; the world of Paris salons is so eager for amusement, and a joke lasts for such a short time, that every one is eager to pluck the flower while it blooms.

All unconsciously, the general felt flattered by this nonsense. From his place where he had taken his stand, his eyes were drawn again and again to the duchess by countless wavering reflections. He could not help admitting to himself that of all the women whose beauty had captivated his eyes, not one had seemed to be a more exquisite embodiment of faults and fair qualities blended in a completeness that might realize the dreams of earliest manhood. Is there a man in any rank of life that has not felt indefinable rapture in his secret soul over the woman singled out (if only in his dreams) to be his own; when she, in body, soul, and social aspects, satisfies his every requirement, a thrice perfect woman? And if this threefold perfection that flatters his pride is no argument for loving her, it is beyond cavil one of the great inducements to the sentiment. Love would soon be convalescent, as the eighteenth-century moralist remarked, were it not for vanity. And it is certainly true that for every one, man or woman, there is a wealth of pleasure in the superiority of the beloved. Is she set so high by birth that a contemptuous glance can never wound her? is she wealthy enough to surround herself with state which falls nothing short of royalty of kings of finance during their short reign of splendor? is she so ready-witted that a keen-edged jest never brings her into confusion? beautiful enough to rival any woman? Is it such a small thing to know that your self-love will never suffer through her? A man makes these reflections in the twink-

ling of an eye. And how if, in the future opened out by early ripened passion, he catches glimpses of the changeful delight of her charm, the frank innocence of a maiden soul, the perils of love's voyage, the thousand folds of the veil of coquetry? Is not this enough to move the coldest man's heart?

This, therefore, was M. de Montriveau's position with regard to woman; his past life in some measure explaining the extraordinary fact. He had been thrown, when little more than a boy, into the hurricane of Napoleon's wars; his life had been spent on fields of battle. Of women he knew just so much as a traveler knows of a country when he travels across it in haste from one inn to another. The verdict which Voltaire passed upon his eighty years of life might, perhaps, have been applied by Montriveau to his own thirty-seven years of existence; had he not thirty-seven follies with which to reproach himself? At his age he was as much a novice in love as the lad that has just been furtively reading "*Faublas*." Of women he had nothing to learn; of love he knew nothing; and thus, desires, quite unknown before, sprang from this virginity of feeling.

There are men here and there as much engrossed in the work demanded of them by poverty or ambition, art or science, as M. de Montriveau by war and a life of adventure—these know what it is to be in this unusual position if they very seldom confess to it. Every man in Paris is supposed to have been in love. No woman in Paris cares to take what other women have passed over. The dread of being taken for a fool is the source of the coxcomb's bragging so common in France; for in France to have the reputation of a fool is to be a foreigner in one's own country. Vehement desire seized on M. de Montriveau, desire that had gathered strength from the heat of the desert and the first stirrings of a heart unknown as yet in its suppressed turbulence. A strong man, and violent as he was strong, he could keep mastery over

himself; but as he talked of indifferent things, he retired within himself, and swore to possess this woman, for through that thought lay the only way to love for him. Desire became a solemn compact made with himself, an oath after the manner of the Arabs among whom he had lived; for among them a vow is a kind of contract made with Destiny, a man's whole future is solemnly pledged to fulfill it, and everything, even his own death, is regarded simply as a means to the one end.

A younger man would have said to himself: "I should very much like to have the duchess for my mistress!" or, "If the Duchesse de Langeais cared for a man, he would be a very lucky rascal!" But the general said: "I will have Madame de Langeais for my mistress." And if a man takes such an idea into his head when his heart has never been touched before, and love begins to be a kind of religion with him, he little knows into what a hell he has set his foot.

Armand de Montriveau suddenly took flight and went home in the first hot fever-fit of the first love that he had known. When a man has kept all his boyish beliefs, illusions, frankness, and impetuosity into middle age, his first impulse is, as it were, to stretch out a hand to take the thing that he desires; a little later he realizes that there is a gulf set between them, and that it is all but impossible to cross it. A sort of childish impatience seizes him, he wants the thing the more, and trembles or cries. Wherefore, the next day, after the stormiest reflections that had yet perturbed his mind, Armand de Montriveau discovered that he was under the yoke of the senses, and his bondage made the heavier by his love.

The woman so cavalierly treated in his thoughts of yesterday had become a most sacred and dreadful power. She was to be his world, his life, from this time forth. The greatest joy, the keenest anguish, that he had yet known grew colorless before the bare recollection of the least sensation stirred in him by her. The swiftest revolutions in a man's outward

life only touch his interests, while passion brings a complete revulsion of feeling. And so in those who live by feeling, rather than by self-interest, the doers rather than the reasoners, the sanguine rather than the lymphatic temperaments, love works a complete revolution. In a flash, with one single reflection, Armand de Montriveau wiped out his whole past life.

A score of times he asked himself, like a boy: "Shall I go, or shall I not?" and then at last he dressed, went to the Hôtel de Langeais toward eight o'clock that evening, and was admitted. He was to see the woman—ah! not the woman—the idol that he had seen yesterday, among lights, a fresh innocent girl in gauze and silken lace and veiling. He burst in upon her to declare his love, as if it were a question of firing the first shot on a field of battle.

Poor novice! He found his ethereal sylphide shrouded in a brown cashmere dressing-gown ingeniously befrilled, lying languidly stretched out upon a divan in a dimly lighted boudoir. Mme. de Langeais did not so much as rise, nothing was visible of her but her face; her hair was loose but confined by a scarf. A hand indicated a seat, a hand that seemed white as marble to Montriveau by the flickering light of a single candle at the farther side of the room, and a voice as soft as the light said—

"If it had been any one else, Monsieur le Marquis, a friend with whom I could dispense with ceremony, or a mere acquaintance in whom I felt but slight interest, I should have closed my door. I am exceedingly unwell."

"I will go," Armand said to himself.

"But I do not know how it is," she continued (and the simple warrior attributed the shining of her eyes to fever), "perhaps it was a presentiment of your kind visit (and no one can be more sensible of the prompt attention than I), but the vapors have left my head."

"Then may I stay?"

"Oh, I should be very sorry to have you go. I told myself this morning that it was impossible that I should have made the slightest impression on your mind, and that in all probability you took my request for one of the commonplaces of which Parisians are lavish on every occasion. And I forgave your ingratitude in advance. An explorer from the deserts is not supposed to know how exclusive we are in our friendships in the faubourg."

The gracious, half-murmured words dropped one by one, as if they had been weighted with the gladness that apparently brought them to her lips. The duchess meant to have the full benefit of her headache, and her speculation was fully successful. The general, poor man, was really distressed by the lady's simulated distress. Like Crillon listening to the story of the Crucifixion, he was ready to draw his sword against the vapors. How could a man dare to speak just then to this suffering woman of the love that she inspired? Armand had already felt that it would be absurd to fire off a declaration of love point-blank at one so far above other women. With a single thought came understanding of the delicacies of feeling, of the soul's requirements. To love: what was that but to know how to plead, to beg for alms, to wait? And as for the love that he felt, must he not prove it? His tongue was mute, it was frozen by the conventions of the noble faubourg, the majesty of a sick headache, the bashfulness of love. But no power on earth could veil his glances; the heat and the Infinite of the desert blazed in eyes, calm as a panther's, beneath the lids that fell so seldom. The duchess enjoyed the steady gaze that enveloped her in light and warmth.

"Madame la Duchesse," he answered, "I am afraid I express my gratitude for your goodness very badly. At this moment I have but one desire—I wish it were in my power to cure the pain."

"Permit me to throw this off, I feel too warm now,"

she said, gracefully tossing aside a cushion that covered her feet.

"Madame, in Asia your feet would be worth some ten thousand sequins."

"A traveler's compliment!" smiled she.

It pleased the sprightly lady to involve a rough soldier in a labyrinth of nonsense, commonplaces, and meaningless talk, in which he manœuvred, in military language, as Prince Charles* might have done at close quarters with Napoleon. She took a mischievous amusement in reconnoitring the extent of his infatuation by the number of foolish speeches extracted from a novice whom she led step by step into a hopeless maze, meaning to leave him there in confusion. She began by laughing at him, but nevertheless it pleased her to make him forget how time went.

The length of a first visit is frequently a compliment, but Armand was innocent of any such intent. The famous explorer spent an hour in chat on all sorts of subjects, said nothing that he meant to say, and was feeling that he was only an instrument on whom this woman played, when she rose, sat upright, drew the scarf from her hair, and wrapped it about her throat, leaned her elbow on the cushions, did him the honor of a complete cure, and rang for lights. The most graceful movements succeeded to complete repose. She turned to M. de Montriveau, from whom she had just extracted a confidence which seemed to interest her deeply, and said—

"You wish to make game of me by trying to make me believe that you have never loved. It is a man's great pretension with us. And we always believe it! Out of pure politeness. Do we not know what to expect from it for ourselves? Where is the man that has found but a single opportunity of losing his heart? But you love to deceive us, and we submit to be deceived, poor foolish creatures that we are; for your hypoc-

* Commander-in-chief of the Austrian army on the Rhine.

ris is, after all, a homage paid to the superiority of our sentiments, which are all purity."

The last words were spoken with a disdainful pride that made the novice in love feel like a worthless bale flung into the deep, while the duchess was an angel soaring back to her particular heaven.

"Confound it!" thought Armand de Montriveau, "how am I to tell this wild thing that I love her?"

He had told her already a score of times; or, rather, the duchess had a score of times read his secret in his eyes; and the passion in this unmistakably great man promised her amusement and an interest in her empty life. So she prepared with no little dexterity to raise a certain number of redoubts for him to carry by storm before he should gain an entrance into her heart. Montriveau should overleap one difficulty after another; he should be a plaything for her caprice, just as an insect teased by children is made to jump from one finger to another, and in spite of all its pains is kept in the same place by its mischievous tormentor. And yet it gave the duchess inexpressible happiness to see that this strong man had told her the truth. Armand had never loved, as he had said. He was about to go, in a bad humor with himself, and still more out of humor with her; but it delighted her to see a sullenness that she could conjure away with a word, a glance, or a gesture.

"Will you come to-morrow evening?" she asked. "I am going to a ball, but I shall stay at home for you until ten o'clock."

Montriveau spent most of the next day in smoking an indeterminate quantity of cigars in his study window, and so he got through the hours till he could dress and go to the Hôtel de Langeais. To any one who had known the magnificent worth of the man, it would have been grievous to see him grown so small, so distrustful of himself; the mind that might have

shed light over undiscovered worlds shrunk to the proportions of a she-coxcomb's boudoir. Even he himself felt that he had fallen so low already in his happiness that to save his life he could not have told his love to one of his closest friends. Is there not always a trace of shame in the lover's bashfulness, and perhaps in woman a certain exultation over diminished masculine stature? Indeed, but for a host of motives of this kind, how explain why women are nearly always the first to betray the secret?—a secret of which, perhaps, they soon weary.

“Madame la Duchesse cannot yet see visitors, monsieur,” said the man; “she is dressing, she begs you to wait for her here.”

Armand walked up and down the drawing-room, studying her taste in the least details. He admired Mme. de Langeais herself in the objects of her choosing; they revealed her life before he could grasp her personality and ideas. About an hour later the duchess came noiselessly out of her chamber. Montriveau turned, saw her flit like a shadow across the room, and trembled. She came up to him, not with a bourgeoisie's inquiry: “How do I look?” She was sure of herself; her steady eyes said plainly, “I am adorned to please you.”

No one surely, save the old fairy godmother of some princess in disguise, could have wound a cloud of gauze about the dainty throat, so that the dazzling satin skin beneath should gleam through the gleaming folds. The duchess was dazzling. The pale blue color of her gown, repeated in the flowers in her hair, appeared by the richness of its hue to lend substance to a fragile form grown too wholly ethereal; for as she glided toward Armand, the loose ends of her scarf floated about her, putting that valiant warrior in mind of the bright, blue damosel flies* that hover now over water, now over the flowers with which they seem to mingle and blend.

“I have kept you waiting,” she said, with the tone that a

* The *agrion*, a small blue dragon-fly.

woman can always bring into her voice for the man whom she wishes to please.

"I would wait patiently through an eternity," said he, "if I were sure of finding a divinity so fair; but it is no compliment to speak of your beauty to you; nothing save worship could touch you. Suffer me only to kiss your scarf."

"Oh, fie!" she said, with a commanding gesture, "I esteem you enough to give you my hand."

She held it out for his kiss. A woman's hand, still moist from the scented bath, has a soft freshness, a velvet smoothness that sends a tingling thrill from the lips to the soul. And if a man is attracted to a woman, and his senses are as quick to feel pleasure as his heart is full of love, such a kiss, though chaste in appearance, may conjure up a terrific storm.

"Will you always give it me thus?" the general asked humbly, when he had pressed that dangerous hand respectfully to his lips.

"Yes, but there we must stop," she said, smiling. She sat down, and seemed very slow over putting on her gloves, trying to slip the unstretched kid over all her fingers at once, while she watched M. de Montriveau; and he was lost in admiration of the duchess and those repeated graceful movements of hers.

"Ah! you were punctual," she said; "that is right. I like punctuality. It is the courtesy of kings, his majesty says; but to my thinking, from you men it is the most respectful flattery of all. Now, is it not? Just tell me."

Again she gave him a side-glance to express her insidious friendship, for he was dumb with happiness—sheer happiness through such nothings as these! Oh, the duchess understood *son métier de femme*—the art and mystery of being a woman—most marvelously well; she knew, to admiration, how to raise a man in his own esteem as he humbled himself to her; how to reward every step of the descent to sentimental folly with hollow flatteries.

"You will never forget to come at nine o'clock."

"No; but are you going to a ball every night?"

"Do I know?" she answered, with a little childlike shrug of the shoulders; the gesture was meant to say that she was nothing if not capricious, and that a lover must take her as she was. "Beside," she added, "what is that to you? You shall be my escort."

"That would be difficult to-night," he objected; "I am not properly dressed."

"It seems to me," she returned loftily, "that if any one has a right to complain of your costume, it is I. Know, therefore, *monsieur le voyageur*,* that if I accept a man's arm, he is forthwith above the laws of fashion, nobody would venture to criticise him. You do not know the world, I see; I like you the better for it."

And even as she spoke she swept him into the pettiness of that world by the attempt to initiate him into the vanities of a woman of fashion.

"If she chooses to do a foolish thing for me, I should be a simpleton to prevent her," said Armand to himself. "She has a liking for me beyond a doubt; and, as for the world, she cannot despise it more than I do. So, now for the ball if she likes."

The duchess probably thought that if the general came with her and appeared in a ballroom in boots and a black tie, nobody would hesitate to believe that he was violently in love with her. And the general was well pleased that the queen of fashion should think of compromising herself for him; hope gave him wit. He had gained confidence, he brought out his thoughts and views; he felt nothing of the restraint that weighed on his spirits yesterday. His talk was interesting and animated, and full of those first confidences so sweet to make and to receive.

Was Mme. de Langeais really carried away by his talk, or

* Mister Traveler.

had she devised this charming piece of coquetry? At any rate, she looked up mischievously as the clock struck twelve.

"Ah! you have made me too late for the ball!" she exclaimed, surprised and vexed that she had forgotten how time was going.

The next moment she approved the exchange of pleasures with a smile that made Armand's heart give a sudden leap.

"I certainly promised Madame de Beauséant," she added. "They are all expecting me."

"Very well—go."

"No—go on. I will stay. Your Eastern adventures fascinate me. Tell me the whole story of your life. I love to share in a brave man's hardships, and I feel them all, indeed I do!"

She was playing with her scarf, twisting it and pulling it to pieces, with jerky, impatient movements that seemed to tell of inward dissatisfaction and deep reflection.

"Women are fit for nothing," she went on. "Ah! we are contemptible, selfish, frivolous creatures. We can bore ourselves with amusements, and that is all we can do. Not one of us that understands that she has a part to play in life. In old days in France, women were beneficent lights; they lived to comfort those that mourned, to encourage high virtues, to reward artists and stir new life with noble thoughts. If the world has grown so petty, ours is the fault. You make me loathe the ball and this world in which I live. No, I am not giving up much for you."

She had plucked her scarf to pieces, as a child plays with a flower, pulling away all the petals one by one; and now she crushed it into a ball, and flung it away. She could show her swan's neck.

She rang the bell. "I shall not go out to-night," she told the footman. Her long, blue eyes turned timidly to Armand; and by the look of misgiving in them, he knew that he was meant to take the order for a confession, for a first and great

favor. There was a pause, filled with many thoughts, before she spoke with that tenderness which is often in women's voices, and not so often in their hearts. "You have had a hard life," she said.

"No," returned Armand. "Until to-day I did not know what happiness was."

"Then you know it now?" she asked, looking at him with a demure, keen glance.

"What is happiness for me henceforth but this—to see you, to hear you? Until now I have only known privation; now I know that I can be unhappy——"

"That will do, that will do," she said. "You must go; it is past midnight. Let us regard appearances. People must not talk about us. I do not know quite what I shall say; but the headache is a good-natured friend, and tells no tales."

"Is there to be a ball to-morrow night?"

"You would grow accustomed to the life, I think. Very well. Yes, we will go to another ball to-morrow night."

There was not a happier man in the world than Armand when he went out from her. Every evening he came to Mme. de Langeais' at the hour kept for him by a tacit understanding.

It would be tedious, and, for the many young men who carry a redundancy of such sweet memories in their hearts, it were superfluous to follow the story step by step—the progress of a romance growing in those hours spent together, a romance controlled entirely by a woman's will. If sentiment went too fast, she would raise a quarrel over a word, or when words flagged behind her thoughts, she appealed to the feelings. Perhaps the only way of following such Penelope's progress is by marking its outward and visible signs.

As, for instance, within a few days of their first meeting, the assiduous general had won and kept the right to kiss his lady's insatiable hands. Wherever Mme. de Langeais went, M. de Montriveau was certain to be seen, till people jokingly called him "her grace's orderly." And already he had made

enemies; others were jealous, and envied him his position. Mme. de Langeais had attained her end. The Marquis de Montriveau was among her numerous train of adorers, and a means of humiliating those who boasted of their progress in her good graces, for she publicly gave him preference over them all.

"Decidedly, Monsieur de Montriveau is the man for whom the duchess shows a preference," pronounced Madame de Sérizy.

And who in Paris does not know what it means when a woman "shows a preference?" All went on therefore according to prescribed rule. The anecdotes which people were pleased to circulate concerning the general put that warrior in so formidable a light, that the more adroit quietly dropped their pretensions to the duchess, and remained in her train merely to turn the position to account, and to use her name and personality to make better terms for themselves with certain stars of the second magnitude. And those lesser powers were delighted to take a lover away from Mme. de Langeais. The duchess was keen-sighted enough to see these desertions and treaties with the enemy; and her pride would not suffer her to be the dupe of them. As M. de Talleyrand, one of her great admirers, said, she knew how to take a second edition of revenge, laying the two-edged blade of a sarcasm between the pairs in these "morganatic"* unions. Her mocking disdain contributed not a little to increase her reputation as an extremely clever woman and a person to be feared. Her character for virtue was consolidated while she amused herself with other people's secrets, and kept her own to herself. Yet, after two months of assiduities, she saw with a vague dread in the depths of her soul that M. de Montriveau understood nothing of the subtleties of flirtation after the manner of the Faubourg Saint-Germain; he was taking a Parisienne's coquetry in earnest.

* Left-handed.

"You will not tame *him*, dear duchess," the old Vidame de Pamiers had said. "'Tis a first cousin to the eagle; he will carry you off to his eyrie if you do not take care."

Then Mme. de Langeais felt afraid. The shrewd old noble's words sounded like a prophecy. The next day she tried to turn love to hate. She was harsh, exacting, irritable, unbearable; Montriveau disarmed her with angelic sweetness. She so little knew the great generosity of a large nature, that the kindly jests with which her first complaints were met went to her heart. She sought a quarrel, and found proofs of affection. She persisted.

"When a man idolizes you, how can he have vexed you?" asked Armand.

"You do not vex me," she answered, suddenly growing gentle and submissive. "But why do you wish to compromise me? For me you ought to be nothing but a *friend*. Do you not know it? I wish I could see that you had the instincts, the delicacy of real friendship, so that I might lose neither your respect nor the pleasure that your presence gives me."

"Nothing but your *friend*!" he cried out. The terrible word sent an electric shock through his brain. "On the faith of these happy hours that you grant me, I sleep and wake in your heart. And now to-day, for no reason, you are pleased to destroy all the secret hopes by which I live. You have required promises of such constancy in me, you have said so much of your horror of women made up of nothing but caprice; and now do you wish me to understand that, like other women here in Paris, you have passions, and know nothing of love? If so, why did you ask my life of me? why did you accept it?"

"I was wrong, my friend. Oh, it is wrong of a woman to yield to such intoxication when she must not and cannot make any return."

"I understand. You have been merely coquetting with me, and——"

"Coquetting?" she repeated. "I detest coquetry. A coquette, Armand, makes promises to many, and gives herself to none; and a woman who keeps such promises is a libertine. This much I believed I had grasped of our code. But to be melancholy with humorists, gay with the frivolous, and politic with ambitious souls; to listen to a babbler with every appearance of admiration, to talk of war with a soldier, wax enthusiastic with philanthropists over the good of the nation, and to give to each one his little dole of flattery—it seems to me that this is as much a matter of necessity as dress, diamonds, and gloves, or flowers in one's hair. Such talk is the moral counterpart of the toilet. You take it up and lay it aside with the plumed head-dress. Do you call this coquetry? Why, I have never treated you as I treat every one else. With you, my friend, I am sincere. Have I not always shared your views, and when you convinced me after a discussion was I not always perfectly glad? In short, I love you, but only as a devout and pure woman may love. I have thought it over. I am a married woman, Armand. My way of life with Monsieur de Langeais gives me liberty to bestow my heart; but law and custom leave me no right to dispose of my person. If a woman loses her honor, she is an outcast in any rank of life? and I have yet to meet with a single example of a man that realizes all that our sacrifices demand of him in such a case. Quite otherwise. Any one can foresee the rupture between Madame de Beauséant and Monsieur d'Ajuda (for he is going to marry Mademoiselle de Rochefide, it seems); that affair made it clear to my mind that these very sacrifices on the woman's part are almost always the cause of the man's desertion. If you had loved me sincerely, you would have kept away for a time. Now, I will lay aside all vanity for you; is not that something? What will not people say of a woman to whom no man attaches himself? Oh, she is heart-

less, brainless, soulless ; and what is more, devoid of charm ! Coquettes will not spare me. They will rob me of the very qualities that mortify them. So long as my reputation is safe, what do I care if my rivals deny my merits ? They certainly will not inherit them. Come, my friend ; give up something for her who sacrifices so much for you. Do not come quite so often ; I shall love you none the less."

"Ah !" said Armand, with the profound irony of a wounded heart in his words and tone. "Love, so the scribblers say, only feeds on illusions. Nothing could be truer, I see ; I am expected to imagine that I am loved. But, there ! —there are some thoughts like wounds, from which there is no recovery. My belief in you was one of the last left to me, and now I see that there is nothing left to believe in this earth."

She began to smile.

"Yes," Montriveau went on in an unsteady voice, "this Catholic faith to which you wish to convert me is a lie that men make for themselves ; hope is a lie at the expense of the future ; pride, a lie between us and our fellows ; and pity, and prudence, and terror are cunning lies. And now my happiness is to be one more lying delusion ; I am expected to delude myself, to be willing to give gold coin for silver to the end. If you can so easily dispense with my visits ; if you can confess me neither as your friend nor your lover, you do not care for me ! And I, poor fool that I am, tell myself this, and know it, and love you !"

"But dear me, poor Armand, you are flying into a passion !"

"I flying into a passion ?"

"Yes. You think that the whole thing is ended because I ask you to be careful."

In her heart of hearts she was delighted with the anger that leaped out in her lover's eyes. Even as she tortured him, she was criticising him, watching every slightest change that

passed over his face. If the general had been so unluckily inspired as to show himself generous without discussion (as happens occasionally with some artless souls), he would have been a banished man for ever, accused and convicted of not knowing how to love. Most women are not displeased to have their code of right and wrong broken through. Do they not flatter themselves that they never yield except to force? But Armand was not learned enough in this kind of lore to see the limed snare so ingeniously spread for him by the knowing duchess. So much of the child was there in the strong man in love.

"If all you want is to preserve appearances," he began in his simplicity, "I am willing to——"

"Simply to preserve appearances!" the lady broke in; "why, what idea can you have of me? Have I given you the slightest reason to suppose that I can ever be yours?"

"Why, what else are we talking about?" demanded Montriveau.

"Monsieur, you frighten me! No, pardon me. Thank you," she added, coldly; "thank you, Armand. You have given me timely warning of imprudence; committed quite unconsciously, believe it, my friend. You know how to endure, you say. I also know how to endure. We will not see each other for a time; and then, when both of us have contrived to recover calmness to some extent, we will think about arrangements for a happiness sanctioned by the world. I am young, Armand; a man with no delicacy might tempt a woman of four-and-twenty to do many foolish, wild things for his sake. But you! You will be my friend, promise me that you will?"

"The woman of four-and-twenty," returned he, "knows what she is about."

He sat down on the divan in the boudoir, and leaned his head on his hands.

"Do you love me, madame?" he asked at length, raising

his head, and turning a face full of resolution upon her. "Say it straight out: Yes or No!"

His direct question dismayed the duchess more than a threat of suicide could have done; indeed, the woman of the century is not to be frightened by that stale stratagem, the sword has ceased to be a part of the masculine costume. But in the effect of eyelids and lashes, in the contraction of the gaze, in the twitching of the lips, is there not some influence that communicates the terror which they express with such vivid magnetic power?

"Ah, if I were free, if——"

"Oh! is it only your husband that stands in the way?" the general exclaimed joyfully, as he strode to and fro in the boudoir. "Dear Antoinette, I wield a more absolute power than the autocrat of all the Russias. I have a compact with Fate; I can advance or retard destiny, so far as men are concerned, at my fancy, as you alter the hands of a watch. If you can direct the course of fate in our political machinery, it simply means (does it not?) that you understand the ins and outs of it. You shall be free before very long, and then you must remember your promise."

"Armand!" she cried. "What do you mean? Great heavens! Can you imagine that I am to be the prize of a crime? Do you want to kill me? Why! you cannot have any religion in you! For my own part, I fear God. Monsieur de Langeais may have given me reason to hate him, but I wish him no manner of harm."

M. de Montriveau beat a tattoo on the marble mantel, and only looked composedly at the lady.

"Dear," continued she, "respect him. He does not love me, he is not kind to me, but I have duties to perform with regard to him. What would I not do to avert the calamities with which you threaten him? Listen," she continued after a pause, "I will not say another word about separation; you shall come here as in the past, and I will still give you my fore-

head to kiss. If I refused once or twice, it was pure coquetry, indeed it was. But let us understand each other," she added as he came closer. "You will permit me to add to the number of my satellites; to receive even more visitors in the morning than heretofore; I mean to be twice as frivolous; I mean to use you to all appearance very badly; to feign a rupture; you must come not quite so often, and then, afterward——"

While she spoke she had allowed him to put an arm about her waist, Montriveau was holding her tightly to him, and she seemed to feel the exceeding pleasure that women usually feel in that close contact, an earnest of the bliss of a closer union. And then, doubtless, she meant to elicit some confidence, for she raised herself on tiptoe, and laid her forehead against Armand's burning lips.

"And then," Montriveau finished her sentence for her, "you shall not speak to me of your husband. You ought not to think of him again."

Mme. de Langeais was silent awhile.

"At least," she said, after a significant pause, "at least you will do all that I wish without grumbling, you will not be naughty; tell me so, my friend? You wanted to frighten me, did you not? Come now, confess it. You are too good ever to think of crimes. But is it possible that you can have secrets that I do not know? How can you control Fate?"

"Now, when you confirm the gift of the heart that you have already given me, I am far too happy to know exactly how to answer you. I can trust you, Antoinette; I shall have no suspicion, no unfounded jealousy of you. *But* if accident should set you free, we shall be one——"

"Accident, Armand?" (with that little dainty turn of the head that seems to say so many things, a gesture that such women as the duchess can use on light occasions, as a great singer can act with her voice). "Pure accident!" she repeated. "Mind that. If anything should happen to Monsieur

de Langeais by your fault, I should never be yours," she added as a parting shot.

And so they parted, mutually content. The duchess had made a pact that left her free to prove to the world by words and deeds that M. de Montriveau was no lover of hers. And as for him, the wily duchess vowed to tire him out. He should have nothing of her beyond the little concessions snatched in the course of contests that she could incite or stop at her pleasure. She had so pretty an art of revoking the grant of yesterday, she was so much in earnest in her purpose to remain technically virtuous, that she felt that there was not the slightest danger for her in preliminaries fraught with peril for a woman less sure of her self-command. After all, the duchess was practically separated from her husband; a marriage long since annulled was no great sacrifice to make to her love.

Montriveau on his side was quite happy to win the vaguest promise, glad once for all to sweep aside, with all scruples of conjugal fidelity, her stock of excuses for refusing herself to his love. He had gained ground a little, and congratulated himself. And so for a time he took unfair advantage of the rights so hardily won. More a boy than he had ever been in his life, he gave himself up to all the childishness that makes first love the flower of life. He was a child again as he poured out all his soul, all the thwarted forces that passion had given him, upon her hands, upon the dazzling forehead that looked so pure to his eyes; upon her fair hair; on the tufted curls where his lips were pressed. And the duchess, on whom his love was poured like a flood, was vanquished by the magnetic influence of her lover's warmth; she hesitated to begin the quarrel that must part them for ever. She was more a woman than she thought, this slight creature, in her effort to reconcile the demands of religion with the ever-new sensations of vanity, the semblance of pleasure which turns a Parisienne's head. Every Sunday she went to mass; she never missed a service; then, when evening came, she was

steeped in the intoxicating bliss of repressed desire. Armand and Mme. de Langeais, like Hindoo fakirs, found the reward of their continence in the temptations to which it gave rise. Possibly, the duchess had ended by resolving love into fraternal caresses, harmless enough, as it might have seemed to the rest of the world, while they borrowed extremes of degradation from the license of her thoughts. How else explain the incomprehensible mystery of her continual fluctuations? Every morning she proposed to herself to shut her door on the Marquis de Montriveau; every evening, at the appointed hour, she fell under the charm of his presence. There was a languid defense; then she grew less unkind. Her words were sweet and soothing. They were lovers—lovers only could have been thus. For him the duchess would display her most sparkling wit, her most captivating wiles; and when at last she had wrought upon his senses and his soul, she might submit herself passively to his fierce caresses, but she had her *ne plus ultra* of passion; and when once it was reached, she grew angry if he lost the mastery of himself and made as though he would pass beyond. No woman on earth can brave the consequences of refusal without some motive; nothing is more natural than to yield to love; wherefore Mme. de Langeais promptly raised a second line of fortification, a stronghold less easy to carry than the first. She evoked the terrors of religion. Never did father of the church, however eloquent, plead the cause of God better than the duchess. Never was the wrath of the Most High better proclaimed than by her voice. She used no preacher's commonplaces, no rhetorical amplifications. No. She had a "pulpit-tremor" of her own. To Armand's most passionate entreaty, she replied with a tearful gaze, and a gesture in which a terrible plenitude of emotion found expression. She stopped his mouth with an appeal for mercy. She would not hear another word; if she did, she must succumb; and better death than criminal happiness.

"Is it nothing to disobey God?" she asked him, recovering a voice grown faint in the crises of inward struggles, through which the fair actress appeared to find it hard to preserve her self-control. "I would sacrifice society, I would give up the whole world for you, gladly; but it is very selfish of you to ask my whole after-life of me for a moment of pleasure. Come, now! are you not happy?" she added, holding out her hand; and certainly in her careless toilette the sight of her afforded consolations to her lover, who made the most of them.

Sometimes from policy, to keep her hold on a man whose ardent passion gave her emotions unknown before, sometimes in weakness, she suffered him to snatch a swift kiss; and immediately, in feigned terror, she flushed red and exiled Armand from the lounge so soon as it became dangerous ground.

"Your joys are sins for me to expiate, Armand; they are paid for by penitence and remorse," she cried.

And Montriveau, now at two chairs' distance from that aristocratic petticoat, betook himself to blasphemy and railed against Providence. The duchess grew angry at such times.

"My friend," she would say drily, "I do not understand why you decline to believe in God, for it is impossible to believe in man. Hush, do not talk like that. You have too great a nature to take up their Liberal nonsense with its pretension to abolish God."

Theological and political disputes acted like a cold douche on Montriveau; he calmed down; he could not return to love when the duchess stirred up his wrath by suddenly setting him down a thousand miles away from the boudoir, discussing theories of absolute monarchy, which she defended to admiration. Few women venture to be democrats; the attitude of democratic champion is scarcely compatible with tyrannous feminine sway. But often, on the other hand, the general shook out his mane, dropped politics with a leonine growling

and lashing of the flanks, and sprang upon his prey ; he was no longer capable of carrying a heart and brain at such variance for very far ; he came back, terrible with love, to his mistress. And she, if she felt the prick of fancy stimulated to a dangerous point, knew that it was time to leave her boudoir ; she came out of the atmosphere surcharged with desires that she drew in with her breath, sat down to the piano, and sang the most exquisite songs of modern music, and so baffled the physical attraction which at times showed her no mercy, though she was strong enough to fight it down.

At such times she was something sublime in Armand's eyes ; she was not acting, she was genuine ; the unhappy lover was convinced that she loved him. Her egoistic resistance deluded him into a belief that she was a pure and sainted woman ; he resigned himself ; he talked of Platonic love, did this artillery officer !

When Mme. de Langeais had played with religion sufficiently to suit her own purposes, she played with it again for Armand's benefit. She wanted to bring him back to a Christian frame of mind ; she brought out her edition of "The Genius of Christianity," adapted for the use of military men. Montriveau chafed ; his yoke was heavy. Oh ! at that, possessed by the spirit of contradiction, she dinned religion into his ears, to see whether God might not rid her of this suitor, for the man's persistence was beginning to frighten her. And in any case she was glad to prolong any quarrel, if it bade fair to keep the dispute on moral grounds for an indefinite period ; the material struggle which followed it was more dangerous.

But if the time of her opposition on the ground of the marriage law might be said to be the civil epoch of this sentimental warfare, the ensuing phase which might be taken to constitute the religious epoch had also its crisis and consequent decline of severity.

Armand, napping to come in very early one evening, found M. l'Abbé Gondrand, the duchess' spiritual director, established in an armchair by the fireside, looking as a spiritual director might be expected to look while digesting his dinner and the charming sins of his penitent. In the ecclesiastic's bearing there was a stateliness befitting a dignitary of the church; and the episcopal violet hue already appeared in his dress. At sight of his fresh, well-preserved complexion, smooth forehead, and ascetic's mouth, Montriveau's countenance grew uncommonly dark; he said not a word under the malicious scrutiny of the other's gaze, and greeted neither the lady nor the priest. The lover apart, Montriveau was not wanting in tact; so a few glances exchanged with the bishop-designate told him that here was the real forger of the duchess' armory of scruples.

That an ambitious abbé should control the happiness of a man of Montriveau's temper, and by underhand ways! The thought burst in a furious tide over his face, clenched his fists, and set him chafing and pacing to and fro; but when he came back to his place intending to make a scene, a single look from the duchess was enough. He was quiet.

Any other woman would have been put out by her lover's gloomy silence; it was quite otherwise with Mme. de Langeais. She continued her conversation with M. de Gondrand on the necessity of reëstablishing the church in its ancient splendor. And she talked brilliantly. The church, she maintained, ought to be a temporal as well as a spiritual power, stating her case better than the abbé had done, and regretting that the Chamber of Peers, unlike the English House of Lords, had no bench of bishops. Nevertheless, the abbé rose, yielded his place to the general, and took his leave, knowing that in Lent he could play a return game. As for the duchess, Montriveau's behavior had excited her curiosity to such a pitch that she scarcely rose to return her director's low bow.

“What is the matter with you, my friend?”

"Why, I cannot stomach that abbé of yours."

"Why did you not take a book?" she asked, careless whether the abbé, then closing the door, heard her or not.

The general paused, for the gesture which accompanied the duchess' speech further increased the exceeding insolence of her words.

"My dear Antoinette, thank you for giving love precedence of the church; but, for pity's sake, allow me to ask one question——"

"Oh! you are questioning me! I am quite willing. You are my friend, are you not? I certainly can open the bottom of my heart to you; you will see only one image there."

"Do you talk about our love to that man?"

"He is my confessor."

"Does he know that I love you?"

"Monsieur de Montriveau, you cannot claim, I think, to penetrate the secrets of the confessional?"

"Does that man know all about our quarrels and my love for you?——"

"That man, monsieur; say God!"

"God again! I ought to be alone in your heart. But leave God alone where He is, for the love of God and me. Madame, you *shall not* go to confession again, or——"

"Or?" she repeated sweetly.

"Or I will never come back here."

"Then go, Armand. Farewell, farewell for ever."

She arose and went to her boudior without so much as a glance at Armand, as he stood with his hand on the back of a chair. How long he stood there motionless he himself never knew. The soul within has the mysterious power of expanding as of contracting space.

He opened the door of the boudoir. It was dark within. A faint voice was raised to say sharply——

"I did not ring. What made you come in without orders? Go away, Suzette."

"Then you suffer," exclaimed Montriveau.

"Stand up, monsieur, and go out of the room for a minute at any rate," she said, ringing the bell.

"Madame la Duchesse rang for lights," said he to the footman, coming in with the candles. When the lovers were alone together, Mme. de Langeais still lay on her couch; she was just as silent and motionless as if Montriveau had not been there.

"Dear, I was wrong," he began, a note of pain and a sublime kindness in his voice. "Indeed, I would not have you without religion——"

"It is fortunate that you can recognize the necessity of a conscience," she said in a hard voice, without looking at him. "I thank you in God's name."

The general was broken down by her harshness; this woman seemed as if she could be at will a sister or a stranger to him. He made one despairing stride toward the door. He would leave her forever without another word. He was wretched; and the duchess was laughing within herself over mental anguish far more cruel than the old judicial torture. But as for going away, it was not in his power to do it. In any sort of crisis, a woman is, as it were, bursting with a certain quantity of things to say; so long as she has not delivered herself of them, she experiences the sensation which we are apt to feel at the sight of something incomplete. Mme. de Langeais had not said all that was in her mind. She took up her parable and said—

"We have not the same convictions, general, I am pained to think. It would be dreadful if a woman could not believe in a religion which permits us to love beyond the grave. I set Christian sentiments aside; you cannot understand them. Let me simply speak to you of expediency. Would you forbid a woman at Court the table of the Lord, for which confession is necessary, when it is customary to take the sacrament at Easter? People must certainly do something for their

party. The Liberals, whatever they may wish to do, will never destroy the religious instinct. Religion will always be a political necessity. Would you undertake to govern a nation of logic-choppers? Napoleon was afraid to try; he persecuted ideologists. If you want to keep people from reasoning, you must give them something to feel. So let us accept the Roman Catholic Church with all its consequences. And if we would have France go to mass, ought we not to begin by going ourselves? Religion, you see, Armand, is a bond uniting all the conservative principles which enable the rich to live in tranquillity. Religion and the rights of property are intimately connected. It is certainly a finer thing to lead a nation by ideas of morality than by fear of the scaffold, as in the time of the Terror—the one method by which your odious Revolution could enforce obedience. The priest and the King—that means you, and me, and the princess my neighbor; and, in a word, the interests of all honest people personified. There, my friend, just be so good as to belong to your party, you that might be its Sulla if you had the slightest ambition that way. I know nothing about politics myself; I argue from my own feelings; but still I know enough to guess that society would be overturned if people were always calling its foundations in question——”

“If that is how your Court and your Government think, I am sorry for you,” broke in Montriveau. “The Restoration, madame, ought to say, like Catherine dei Medici, when she heard that the battle of Dreux was lost: ‘Very well; now we will go to their meeting-houses.’ Now 1815 was your battle of Dreux. Like the royal power of those days, you won in fact, while you lost in right. Political Protestantism has gained an ascendancy over people’s minds. If you have no mind to issue your Edict of Nantes; or if, when it is issued, you publish a Revocation; if you should one day be accused and convicted of repudiating the Charter, which is simply a pledge given to maintain the interests established under the

Republic, then the Revolution will rise again, terrible in her strength, and strike but a single blow. It will not be the Revolution that will go into exile; she is the very soil of France. Men die, but people's interests do not die—— Eh, great heavens! what are France and the crown and rightful sovereigns, and the whole world beside, to us? Idle words compared with my happiness. Let them reign or be hurled from the throne, little do I care. Where am I now?"

"In the Duchesse de Langeais' boudoir, my friend."

"No, no. No more of the duchess, no more of Langeais; I am with my dear Antoinette."

"Will you do me the pleasure to stay where you are," she said, laughing and pushing him back, gently however.

"So you have never loved me," he retorted, and anger flashed in lightning from his eyes.

"No, dear;" but the "No" was equivalent to "Yes."

"I am a great ass," he said, kissing her hands. The terrible queen was a woman once more. "Antoinette," he went on, laying his head on her feet, "you are too chastely tender to speak of our happiness to any one in this world."

"Oh!" she cried, rising to her feet with a swift, graceful spring, "you are a great simpleton." And without another word she fled into the drawing-room.

"What is it now?" wondered the general, little knowing that the touch of his burning forehead had sent a swift electric thrill through her from foot to head.

In hot wrath he followed her to the drawing-room, only to hear divinely sweet chords. The duchess was at the piano. If the man of science or the poet can at once enjoy and comprehend, bringing his intelligence to bear upon his enjoyment without loss of delight, he is conscious that the alphabet and phraseology of music are but cunning instruments for the composer, like the wood and copper wire under the hands of the executant. For the poet and the man of science there is a music existing apart, underlying the double expression of this

language of the spirit and senses. *Andiamo mio ben* can draw tears of joy or pitying laughter at the will of the singer; and not infrequently one here and there in the world, some girl unable to live and bear the heavy burden of an unguessed pain, some man whose soul vibrates with the throb of passion, may take up a musical theme, and lo! heaven is opened for them, or they find a language for themselves in some sublime melody, some song lost to the world.

The general was listening now to such a song; a mysterious music unknown to all other ears, as the solitary plaint of some mateless bird dying alone in a virgin forest.

"Great heavens! what are you playing there?" he asked in an unsteady voice.

"The prelude of a ballad, called, I believe, '*Fleuve du Tage*.'"

"I did not know that there was such music in a piano," he returned.

"Ah!" she said, and for the first time she looked at him as a woman looks at the man she loves, "nor do you know, my friend, that I love you, and that you cause me horrible suffering; and that I feel that I must utter my cry of pain without putting it too plainly into words. If I did not I should yield—— But you see nothing."

"And you will not make me happy!"

"Armand, I should die of sorrow the next day."

The general turned abruptly from her and went. But out in the street he brushed away the tears that he would not let fall.

The religious phase lasted for three months. At the end of that time the duchess grew weary of vain repetitions; the church, bound hand and foot, was delivered up to her lover. Possibly she may have feared that by sheer dint of talking of eternity she might perpetuate his love in this world and the next. For her own sake, it must be believed that no man had touched her heart, or her conduct would be inexcusable. She

was young ; the time when men and women feel that they cannot afford to lose time or to quibble over their joys was still far off. She, no doubt, was on the verge not of first love, but of her first experience of the bliss of love. And from inexperience, for want of the painful lessons which would have taught her to value the treasure poured out at her feet, she was playing with it. Knowing nothing of the glory and rapture of the light, she was fain to stay in the shadow.

Armand was just beginning to understand this strange situation ; he put his hope in the first word spoken by nature. Every evening, as he came away from Mme. de Langeais', he told himself that no woman would accept the tenderest, most delicate proofs of a man's love during seven months, nor yield passively to the slighter demands of passion, only to cheat love at the last. He was waiting patiently for the sun to gain power, not doubting but that he should receive the earliest fruits. The married woman's hesitations and the religious scruples he could quite well understand. He even rejoiced over those battles. He mistook the duchess' heartless coquetry for modesty ; and he would not have had her otherwise. So he had loved to see her devising obstacles ; was he not gradually triumphing over them ? Did not every victory won swell the meagre sum of lovers' intimacies long denied, and at last conceded with every sign of love ? Still, he had had such leisure to taste the full sweetness of every small successive conquest on which a lover feeds his love, that these had come to be matters of use and wont. So far as obstacles went, there were none now save his own awe of her ; nothing else left between him and his desire save the whims of her who allowed him to call her Antoinette. So he made up his mind to demand more, to demand all. Embarrassed like a young lover who cannot dare to believe that his idol can stoop so low, he hesitated for a long time. He passed through the experience of terrible reactions within himself. A set purpose was anni-

hilated by a word, and definite resolves died within him on the threshold. He despised himself for his weakness, and still his desire remained unuttered.

Nevertheless, one evening, after sitting in gloomy melancholy, he brought out a fierce demand for his illegally legitimate rights. The duchess had not to wait for her bond-slave's request to guess his desire. When was a man's desire a secret? And have not women an intuitive knowledge of the meaning of certain changes of countenance?

"What! you wish to be my friend no longer?" she broke in at the first words, and a divine red surging like new blood under the transparent skin lent brightness to her eyes. "As a reward for my generosity, you would dishonor me? Just reflect a little. I myself have thought much over this; and I think always for us *both*. There is such a thing as a woman's loyalty; and we can no more fail in it than you can fail in honor. I cannot bind myself. If I am yours, how, in any sense, can I be Monsieur de Langeais' wife? Can you require the sacrifice of my position, my rank, my whole life, in return for a doubtful love that could not wait patiently for seven months? What! already you would rob me of my right to dispose of myself? No, no; you must not talk like this again. No, not another word. I will not, I cannot listen to you."

Mme. de Langeais raised both hands to her head to push back the tufted curls from her hot forehead; she seemed very much excited.

"You come to a weak woman with your purpose definitely planned out. You say—'For a certain length of time she will talk to me of her husband, then of God, and then of the inevitable consequences. But I will use and abuse the ascendancy I shall gain over her; I will make myself indispensable; all the bonds of habit, all the misconstructions of outsiders, will make for me; and at length, when our *liaison* is taken for granted by all the world, I shall be this

woman's master.' Now, be frank, these are your thoughts! Oh! you calculate, and you say that you love. Shame on you! You are enamored? Ah! that I well believe! You wish to possess me, to have me for your mistress, that is all! Very well then, No! The *Duchesse de Langeais* will not descend so far. Simple *bourgeoises* may be the victims of your treachery—I, never! Nothing gives me assurance of your love. You speak of my beauty; I may lose every trace of it in six months, like the dear princess, my neighbor. You are captivated by my wit, my grace. Great heavens! you would soon grow used to them and to the pleasures of possession. Have not the little concessions that I was weak enough to make come to be a matter of course in the last few months? Some day, when ruin comes, you will give me no reason for the change in you beyond a curt: 'I have ceased to care for you.' Then, rank and fortune and honor and all that was the *Duchesse de Langeais* will be swallowed up in one disappointed hope. I shall have children to bear witness to my shame, and——" With an involuntary gesture she interrupted herself, and continued: "But I am too good-natured to explain all this to you when you know it better than I. Come! let us stay as we are. I am only too fortunate in that I can still break these bonds which you think so strong. Is there anything so very heroic in coming to the *Hôtel de Langeais* to spend an evening with a woman whose prattle amuses you?—a woman whom you take for a plaything? Why, half-a-dozen young coxcombs come here just as regularly every afternoon between three and five. They, too, are very generous, I am to suppose? I make fun of them; they stand my petulance and insolence pretty quietly, and make me laugh; but as for you, I give all the treasures of my soul to you, and you wish to ruin me—you try my patience in endless ways. Hush, that will do, that will do," she continued, seeing that he was about to speak, "you have no heart, no soul, no delicacy. I know what you want to tell me. Very well, then—

yes. I would rather you should take me for a cold, insensible woman, with no devotion in her composition, no heart even, than be taken by everybody else for a vulgar person, and be condemned to your so-called pleasures, of which you would most certainly tire, and to everlasting punishment for it afterward. Your selfish love is not worth so many sacrifices."

The words give but a very inadequate idea of the discourse which the duchess trilled out with the quick volubility of a bird-organ. Nor, truly, was there anything to prevent her from talking on for some time to come, for poor Armand's only reply to the torrent of flute notes was a silence filled with cruelly painful thoughts. He was just beginning to see that this woman was playing with him; he divined instinctively that a devoted love, a responsive love, does not reason and count the consequences in this way. Then, as he heard her reproach him with detestable motives, he felt something like shame as he remembered that unconsciously he had made those very calculations. With angelic honesty of purpose, he looked within, and self-examination found nothing but selfishness in all his thoughts and motives, in the answers which he framed and could not utter. He was self-convicted. In his despair he longed to fling himself from the window. The egoism of it was intolerable.

What indeed can a man say when a woman will not believe in love? Let me prove how much I love you. The *I* is always there.

The heroes of the boudoir, in such circumstances, can follow the example of the primitive logician who preceded the Pyrrhonists and denied movement. Montriveau was not equal to this feat. With all his audacity, he lacked that precise kind which never deserts an adept in the formulas of feminine algebra. If so many women, and even the best of women, fall a prey to a kind of expert to whom the vulgar give a grosser name, it is perhaps because the said experts are great *provers*, and love, in spite of its delicious poetry of sentiment,

requires a little more geometry than the generality of people are wont to think.

Now the duchess and Montriveau were alike in this—they were both equally unversed in love lore. The lady's knowledge of theory was but scanty ; in practice she knew nothing whatever ; she felt nothing, and reflected over everything. Montriveau had had but little experience, was absolutely ignorant of theory, and felt too much to reflect at all. Both therefore were enduring the consequences of the singular situation. At that supreme moment the myriad thoughts in his mind might have been reduced to the formula—"Submit to be mine——" words which seem horribly selfish to a woman for whom they awaken no memories, recall no ideas. Something nevertheless he must say. And what was more, though her barbed shafts had set his blood tingling, though the short phrases that she discharged at him one by one were very keen and sharp and cold, he must control himself lest he should lose all by an outbreak of anger.

"Madame la Duchesse, I am in despair that God should have invented no way for a woman to confirm the gift of her heart save by adding the gift of her person. The high value which you yourself put upon the gift teaches me that I cannot attach less importance to it. If you have given me your inmost self and your whole heart, as you tell me, what can the rest matter ? And beside, if my happiness means so painful a sacrifice, let us say no more about it. But you must pardon a man of spirit if he feels humiliated at being taken for a spaniel."

The tone in which the last remark was uttered might perhaps have frightened another woman ; but when the wearer of a petticoat has allowed herself to be addressed as a divinity, and thereby set herself above all other mortals, no power on earth can be so haughty.

"Monsieur le Marquis, I am in despair that God should not have invented some nobler way for a man to confirm the

gift of his heart than by the manifestation of prodigiously vulgar desires. We become bond-slaves when we give ourselves body and soul, but a man is bound to nothing by accepting the gift. Who will assure me that love will last? The very love that I might show for you at every moment, the better to keep your love, might serve you as a reason for deserting me. I have no wish to be a second edition of Madame de Beauséant. Who can ever know what it is that keeps you beside us? Our persistent coldness of heart is the cause of an unfailing passion in some of you; other men ask for an untiring devotion, to be idolized at every moment; some for gentleness, others for tyranny. No woman in this world as yet has really read the riddle of man's heart."

There was a pause. When she spoke again it was in a different tone.

"After all, my friend, you cannot prevent a woman from trembling at the question: 'Will this love last always?' Hard though my words may be, the dread of losing you puts them into my mouth. Oh, me! it is not I who speaks, dear, it is reason; and how should any one so mad as I be reasonable? In truth, I am nothing of the sort."

The poignant irony of her answer had changed before the end into the most musical accents in which a woman could find utterance for ingenuous love. To listen to her words was to pass in a moment from martyrdom to heaven. Montriveau grew pale; and for the first time in his life he fell on his knees before a woman. He kissed the duchess' skirt hem, her knees, her feet; but for the credit of the Faubourg Saint-Germain it is necessary to respect the mysteries of its boudoirs, where many are fain to take the utmost that Love can give without giving proof of love in return.

The duchess thought herself generous when she suffered herself to be adored. But Montriveau was in a wild frenzy of joy over her complete surrender of the position.

"Dear Antoinette," he cried. "Yes, you are right; I will

not have you doubt any longer. I too am trembling at this moment—lest the angel of my life should leave me; I wish I could invent some tie that might bind us to each other irrevocably.”

“Ah!” she said, under her breath, “so I was right, you see.”

“Let me say all that I have to say; I will scatter all your fears with a word. Listen! if I deserted you, I should deserve to die a thousand deaths. Be wholly mine, and I will give you the right to kill me if I am false. I myself will write a letter explaining certain reasons for taking my own life; I will make my final arrangements, in short. You shall have the letter in your keeping; in the eye of the law it will be a sufficient explanation of my death. You can avenge yourself, and fear nothing from God or men.”

“What good would the letter be to me? What would life be if I had lost your love? If I wished to kill you, should I not be ready to follow? No; thank you for the thought, but I do not want the letter. Should I not begin to dread that you were faithful to me through fear? And if a man knows that he must risk his life for a stolen pleasure, might it not seem more tempting? Armand, the thing I ask of you is the one hard thing to do.”

“Then what is it that you wish?”

“Your obedience and my liberty.”

“Ah, God!” cried he, “I am a child.”

“A wayward, much-spoilt child,” she said, stroking the thick hair, for his head still lay on her knee. “Ah! and loved far more than he believes, and yet he is very disobedient. Why not stay as we are? Why not sacrifice to me the desires that hurt me? Why not take what I can give, when it is all that I can honestly grant? Are you not happy, Armand?”

“Oh yes, I am happy when I have not a doubt left. Antoinette, doubt in love is a kind of death, is it not?”

In a moment he showed himself as he was, as all men are under the influence of that hot fever; he grew eloquent, insinuating. And the duchess tasted the pleasures which she reconciled with her conscience by some private, jesuitical ukase of her own; Armand's love gave her a thrill of cerebral excitement which custom made as necessary to her as society, or the opera. To feel that she was adored by this man, who rose above other men, whose character frightened her; to treat him like a child; to play with him as Poppæa played with Nero—many women, like the wives of King Henry VIII., have paid for such a perilous delight with all the blood in their veins. Grim presentiment! Even as she surrendered the delicate, pale, gold curls to his touch, and felt the close pressure of his hand, the little hand of a man whose greatness she could not mistake; even as she herself played with his dark, thick locks, in that boudoir where she reigned a queen, the duchess would say to herself—

“This man is capable of killing me if he once finds out that I am playing with him.”

Armand de Montriveau stayed with her till two o'clock in the morning. From that moment this woman, whom he loved, was neither a duchess nor a Navarreins; Antoinette, in her disguises, had gone so far as to appear to be a woman. On that most blissful evening, the sweetest prelude ever played by a Parisienne to what the world calls “a slip;” in spite of all her affectations of a coyness which she did not feel, the general saw all maidenly beauty in her. He had some excuse for believing that so many storms of caprice had been but clouds covering a heavenly soul; that these must be lifted one by one like the veils that hid her divine loveliness. The duchess became, for him, the most simple and girlish mistress; she was the one woman in the world for him; and he went away quite happy in that at last he had brought her to give him such pledges of love that it seemed to him impossible

but that he should be but her husband henceforth in secret, her choice sanctioned by heaven.

Armand went slowly home, turning this thought in his mind with the impartiality of a man who is conscious of all the responsibilities that love lays on him while he tastes the sweetness of its joys. He went along the quays to see the widest possible space of sky; his heart had grown in him; he would fain have had the bounds of the firmament and of earth enlarged. It seemed to him that his lungs drew an ampler breath. In the course of his self-examination, as he walked, he vowed to love this woman so devoutly that every day of her life she should find absolution for her sins against society in unfailing happiness. Sweet stirrings of life when life is at the full! The man that is strong enough to steep his soul in the color of one emotion feels infinite joy as glimpses open out for him of an ardent lifetime that knows no diminution of passion to the end; even so it is permitted to certain mystics, in ecstasy, to behold the Light of God. Love would be naught without the belief that it would last for ever; love grows great through constancy. It was thus that, wholly absorbed by his happiness, Montriveau understood passion.

“We belong to each other for ever!”

The thought was like a talisman fulfilling the wishes of his life. He did not ask whether the duchess might not change, whether her love might not last. No, for he had faith. Without that virtue there is no future for Christianity, and perhaps it is even more necessary to society. A conception of life as feeling occurred to him for the first time; hitherto he had lived by action, the most strenuous exertion of human energies, the physical devotion, as it may be called, of the soldier.

Next day M. de Montriveau went early in the direction of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. He had made an appointment at a house not far from the Hôtel de Langeais; and the busi-

ness over, he went thither as if to his own home. The general's companion chanced to be a man for whom he appeared to feel a kind of repulsion whenever he met him in other houses. This was the Marquis de Ronquerolles, whose reputation had grown so great in Paris boudoirs. He was witty, clever, and what was more—courageous; he set the fashion to all the young men in Paris. As a man of gallantry, his success and experience were equally matters of envy; and neither fortune nor birth was wanting in his case, qualifications which add such lustre in Paris to a reputation as a leader of fashion.*

"Where are you going?" asked M. de Ronquerolles.

"To Madame de Langeais'."

"Ah, true. I forgot that you had allowed her to lime you. You are wasting your affections on her when they might be much better employed elsewhere. I could have told you of half-a-score of women in the financial world, any one of them a thousand times better worth your while than that titled courtesan, who does with her brains what less artificial women do with——"

"What is this, my dear fellow?" Armand broke in.

"The duchess is an angel of innocence."

Ronquerolles began to laugh.

"Things being thus, dear boy," said he, "it is my duty to enlighten you. Just a word; there is no harm in it between ourselves. Has the duchess surrendered? If so, I have nothing more to say. Come, give me your confidence. There is no occasion to waste your time in grafting your great nature on that unthankful stock, when all your hopes and cultivation will come to nothing."

Armand ingenuously made a kind of general report of his position, enumerating with much minuteness the slender rights so hardly won. Ronquerolles burst into a peal of laughter

* Montriveau and Ronquerolles belonged to "The Thirteen." See Preface.

so heartless that it would have cost any other man his life. But from their manner of speaking and looking at each other during that colloquy beneath the wall, in a corner almost as remote from intrusion as the desert itself, it was easy to imagine the friendship between the two men knew no bounds, and that no power on earth could estrange them.

“My dear Armand, why did you not tell me that the duchess was a puzzle to you? I would have given you a little advice which might have brought your flirtation properly through. You must know, to begin with, that the women of our faubourg, like any other women, love to steep themselves in love; but they have a mind to possess and not to be possessed. They have made a sort of compromise with human nature. The code of their parish gives them a pretty wide latitude short of the last transgression. The sweets enjoyed by this fair duchess of yours are so many venial sins to be washed away in the waters of penitence. But if you had the impertinence to ask in earnest for the mortal sin to which naturally you are sure to attach the highest importance, you would see the deep disdain with which the door of the boudoir and the house would be incontinently shut upon you. The tender Antoinette would dismiss everything from her memory; you would be less than a cipher for her. She would wipe away your kisses, my dear friend, as indifferently as she would perform her ablutions. She would sponge love from her cheeks as she washes off rouge. We know women of that sort—the thoroughbred Parisienne. Have you ever noticed a grisette tripping along the street? Her face is pretty as a picture. A neat cap, fresh cheeks, trim hair, a guileful smile, and the rest of her almost neglected. Is not this true to the life? Well, that is the Parisienne. She knows that her face is all that will be seen, so she devotes all her care, finery, and vanity to her head. The duchess is the same; the head is everything with her. She can only feel through her intellect, her heart lies in her brain, she is a sort of intellectual epicure, she has a head-voice.

We call that kind of poor creature a *Laïs* of the intellect. You have been taken in like a boy. If you doubt it, you can have proof of it to-night, this morning, this instant. Go up to her, try the demand as an experiment, insist peremptorily if it is refused. You might set about it like the late *Maréchal de Richelieu*, and yet get nothing for your pains."

Armand was dumb with amazement.

"Has your desire reached the point of infatuation?"

"I want her at any cost!" Montriveau cried out despairingly.

"Very well. Now, look here. Be as inexorable as she is herself. Try to humiliate her, to sting her vanity. Do *not* try to move her heart, nor her soul, but the woman's nerves and temperament, for she is both nervous and lymphatic. If you can once awaken desire in her, you are safe. But you must drop these romantic boyish notions of yours. If when once you have her in your eagle's talons you yield a point or draw back, if you so much as stir an eyelid, if she thinks that she can regain her ascendancy over you, she will slip out of your clutches like a fish, and you will never catch her again. Be inflexible as law. Show no more charity than the headsmen. Hit hard, and then hit again. Strike and keep on striking as if you were giving her the knout. Duchesses are made of hard stuff, my dear Armand; there is a sort of feminine nature that is only softened by repeated blows; and as suffering develops a heart in women of that sort, so it is a work of charity not to spare the rod. Do you persevere. Ah! when pain has thoroughly relaxed those nerves and softened the fibres that you take to be so pliant and yielding; when a shriveled heart has learned to expand and contract and to beat under this discipline; when the brain has capitulated—then, perhaps, passion may enter among the steel springs of this machinery that turns out tears and affectations and languors and melting phrases; then you shall see a most magnificent conflagration (always supposing

that the chimney takes fire). The steel feminine system will glow red-hot like iron in the forge; that kind of heat lasts longer than any other, and the glow of it may possibly turn to love.

"Still," he continued, "I have my doubts. And, after all, is it worth while to take so much trouble with the duchess? Between ourselves, a man of my stamp ought first to take her in hand and break her in; I would make a charming woman of her; she is a thoroughbred; whereas, you two left to yourselves will never get beyond the A B C of love. But you are in love with her, and just now you might not perhaps share my views on this subject.

"A pleasant time to you, my children," added Ronquerolles, after a pause. Then with a laugh: "I have decided myself for facile beauties; they are tender, at any rate, the natural woman appears in their love without any of your social seasonings. A woman that haggles over herself, my poor boy, and only means to inspire love! Well, have her like an extra horse—for show. The match between the lounge and confessional, black and white, queen and knight, conscientious scruples and pleasure, is an uncommonly amusing game of chess. And if a man knows the game, let him be never so little of a rake, he wins in three moves. Now, if I undertook a woman of that sort, I should start with the deliberate purpose of——" His voice sank to a whisper over the last words in Armand's ear, and he went before there was time for any reply.

As for Montriveau, he sprang at a bound across the courtyard of the Hôtel de Langeais, went unannounced up the stairs straight to the duchess' bedroom.

"This is an unheard-of thing," she said, hastily wrapping her dressing-gown about her. "Armand! this is abominable of you! Come, leave the room, I beg. Just go out of the room, and go at once. Wait for me in the drawing-room. Come, now!"

"Dear angel, has a plighted lover no privilege whatsoever?"

"But, monsieur, it is in the worst possible taste of a plighted lover or a wedded husband to break in like this upon his wife."

He came up to the duchess, took her in his arms, and held her tightly to him.

"Forgive, dear Antoinette; but a host of horrid doubts are fermenting in my heart."

"Doubts? Fie! Oh, fie on you!"

"Doubts all but justified. If you loved me, would you make this quarrel? Would you not be glad to see me? Would you not have felt a something stir in your heart? For I, that am not a woman, feel a thrill in my inmost self at the mere sound of your voice. Often in a ballroom a longing has come upon me to spring to your side and put my arms about your neck."

"Oh! if you have doubts of me so long as I am not ready to spring to your arms before all the world, I shall be doubted all my life long, I suppose. Why, Othello was a mere child compared with you!"

"Ah!" he cried despairingly, "you have no love for me, you——"

"Admit, at any rate, that at this moment you are not lovable."

"Then I have still to find favor in your sight?"

"Oh, I should think so. Come," added she, with a little imperious air, "go out of the room, leave me. I am not like you; I wish always to find favor in your eyes."

Never woman better understood the art of putting charm into insolence, and does not the charm double the effect? is it not enough to infuriate the coolest of men? There was a sort of untrammelled freedom about Mme. de Langeais; a something in her eyes, her voice, her attitude, which is never seen in a woman who loves when she stands face to face with

him at the mere sight of whom her heart must needs begin to beat. The Marquis de Ronquerolles' counsels had cured Armand of sheepishness; and further, there came to his aid that rapid power of intuition which passion will develop at moments in the least wise among mortals, while a great man at such a time possesses it to the full. He guessed the terrible truth revealed by the duchess' nonchalance, and his heart swelled with the storm like a lake rising in flood.

"If you told me the truth yesterday, be mine, dear Antoinette," he cried; "you shall——"

"In the first place," said she composedly, thrusting him back as he came nearer—"in the first place, you are not to compromise me. My woman might overhear you. Respect me, I beg of you. Your familiarity is all very well in my boudoir in an evening; here it is quite different. Beside, what may your 'you shall' mean? 'You shall.' No one as yet has ever used that word to me. It is quite ridiculous, it seems to me, absolutely ridiculous."

"Will you surrender nothing to me on this point?"

"Oh! do you call a woman's right to dispose of herself a 'point?' A capital point, indeed; you will permit me to be entirely my own mistress on that 'point.'"

"And how if, believing in your promises to me, I should absolutely require it?"

"Oh! then you would prove that I made the greatest possible mistake when I made you a promise of any kind; and I should beg you to leave me in peace."

The general's face grew white; he was about to spring to her side, when Mme. de Langeais rang the bell, the maid appeared, and, smiling with a mocking grace, the duchess added: "Be so good as to return when I am visible."

Then Montriveau felt the hardness of a woman as cold and keen as a steel blade; she was crushing in her scorn. In one moment she had snapped the bonds which held firm only for her lover. She had read Armand's intention in his face, and

held that the moment had come for teaching the Imperial soldier his lesson. He was to be made to feel that though duchesses may lend themselves to love, they do not give themselves, and that the conquest of one of them would prove a harder matter than the conquest of Europe.

"Madame," returned Armand, "I have not time to wait. I am a spoilt child, as you told me yourself. When I seriously resolve to have that of which we have been speaking, I shall have it."

"You will have it?" queried she, and there was a trace of surprise in her loftiness.

"I shall have it."

"Oh! you will do me a great pleasure by 'resolving' to have it. For curiosity's sake, I should be delighted to know how you would set about it——"

"I am delighted to put a new interest into your life," interrupted Montriveau, breaking into a laugh which dismayed the duchess. "Will you permit me to take you to the ball to-night?"

"A thousand thanks. Monsieur de Marsay has been beforehand with you. I gave him my promise."

Montriveau bowed gravely and went.

"So Ronquerolles was right," thought he, "and now for a game of chess."

Thenceforward he hid his agitation by complete composure. No man is strong enough to bear such sudden alternations from the height of happiness to the depths of wretchedness. So he had caught a glimpse of happy life the better to feel the emptiness of his previous existence? There was a terrible storm within him; but he had learned to endure, and bore the shock of tumultuous thoughts as a granite cliff stands out against the surge of an angry sea.

"I could say nothing. When I am with her my wits desert me. She does not know how vile and contemptible she is. Nobody has ventured to bring her face to face with herself.

She has played with many a man, no doubt; I will avenge them all."

For the first time, it may be, in a man's heart, revenge and love were blended so equally that Montriveau himself could not know whether love or revenge would carry all before it. That very evening he went to the ball at which he was sure of seeing the Duchesse de Langeais, and almost despaired of reaching her heart. He inclined to think that there was something diabolical about this woman, who was gracious to him and radiant with charming smiles; probably because she had no wish to allow the world to think that she had compromised herself with M. de Montriveau. Coolness on both sides is a sign of love; but so long as the duchess was the same as ever, while the marquis looked sullen and morose, was it not plain that she had conceded nothing? Onlookers know the rejected lover by various signs and tokens; they never mistake the genuine symptoms for a coolness such as some women command their adorers to feign, in the hope of concealing their love. Every one laughed at Montriveau; and he, having omitted to consult his *cornac*,* was abstracted and ill at ease. M. de Ronquerolles would very likely have bidden him compromise the duchess by responding to her show of friendliness by passionate demonstrations; but as it was, Armand de Montriveau came away from the ball, loathing human nature, and even then scarcely ready to believe in such complete depravity.

"If there is no executioner for such crimes," he said, as he looked up at the lighted windows of the ballroom where the most enchanting women in Paris were dancing, laughing, and chatting, "I will take you by the nape of the neck, Madame la Duchesse, and make you feel something that bites more deeply than the knife in the Place de la Grève. Steel against steel; we shall see which heart will leave the deeper mark."

* Lit.: Elephant driver—oracle.

For a week or so Mme. de Langeais hoped to see the Marquis de Montriveau again; but he contented himself with sending his card every morning to the Hôtel de Langeais. The duchess could not help shuddering each time that the card was brought in, and a dim foreboding crossed her mind, but the thought was vague as a presentiment of disaster. When her eyes fell on the name, it seemed to her that she felt the touch of the implacable man's strong hand in her hair; sometimes the words seemed like a prognostication of a vengeance which her lively intellect invented in the most shocking forms. She had studied him too well not to dread him. Would he murder her, she wondered? Would that bull-necked man dash out her vitals by flinging her over his head? Would he trample her body under his feet? When, where, and how would he get her into his power? Would he make her suffer very much, and what kind of pain would he inflict? She repented of her conduct. There were hours when, if he had come, she would have gone to his arms in complete self-surrender.

Every night before she slept she saw Montriveau's face; every night it wore a different aspect. Sometimes she saw his bitter smile, sometimes the Jovelian knitting of the brows; or his leonine look, or some disdainful movement of the shoulders, made him terrible for her. Next day the card seemed stained with blood. The name of Montriveau stirred her now as the presence of the fiery, stubborn, exacting lover had never done. Her apprehensions gathered strength in the silence. She was forced, without aid from without, to face the thought of a hideous duel of which she could not speak. Her proud hard nature was more responsive to thrills of hate than it had ever been to the caresses of love. Ah! if the general could but have seen her, as she sat with her forehead drawn into folds between her brows; immersed in bitter thoughts in that boudoir where he had enjoyed such happy moments, he might perhaps have conceived high hopes. Of

all human passions, is not pride alone incapable of engendering anything base? Mme. de Langeais kept her thoughts to herself, but is it not permissible to suppose that M. de Montriveau was no longer indifferent to her? And has not a man gained ground immensely when a woman thinks about him? He is bound to make progress with her either one way or the other afterward.

Put any feminine creature under the feet of a furious horse or other fearsome beast; she will certainly drop on her knees and look for death; but if the brute shows a milder mood and does not utterly slay her, she will love the horse, lion, bull, or what not, and will speak of him quite at her ease. The duchess felt that she was under the lion's paws; she quaked, but she did not hate him.

The man and woman thus singularly placed with regard to each other met three times in society during the course of that week. Each time, in reply to coquettish questioning glances, the duchess received a respectful bow, and smiles tinged with such savage irony, that all her apprehensions over the card in the morning were revived at night. Our lives are simply such as our feelings shape them for us; and the feelings of these two had hollowed out a great gulf between them.

The Comtesse de Sérizy, the Marquis de Ronquerolles' sister, gave a great ball at the beginning of the following week, and Mme. de Langeais was sure to go to it. Armand was the first person whom the duchess saw when she came into the room, and this time Armand was looking out for her, or so she thought at least. The two exchanged a look, and suddenly the woman felt a cold perspiration break from every pore. She had thought all along that Montriveau was capable of taking reprisals in some unheard-of way proportioned to their condition; and now the revenge had been discovered, it was ready, heated, and boiling. Lightnings flashed from the foiled lover's eyes, his face was radiant with exultant vengeance. And the duchess? Her eyes were haggard in spite of her

resolution to be cool and insolent. She went to take her place beside the Comtesse de Sérizy, who could not help exclaiming: "Dear Antoinette! what is the matter with you? You are enough to frighten one."

"I shall be all right after a quadrille," she answered, giving a hand to a young man who came up at that moment.

Mme. de Langeais waltzed that evening with a sort of excitement and transport which redoubled Montriveau's lowering looks. He stood in front of the line of spectators, who were amusing themselves by looking on. Every time that the duchess came past him, his eyes darted down upon her eddying face; he might have been a tiger with the prey in his grasp. The waltz came to an end, Mme. de Langeais went back to her place beside the countess, and the Marquis de Montriveau never took his eyes off her, talking all the while with a stranger.

"One of the things that struck me most on the journey," he was saying (and the duchess listened with all her ears), "was the remark which the man makes at Westminster when you are shown the axe with which a man in a mask cut off Charles the First's head, so they tell you. The King made it first of all to some inquisitive person, and they repeat it still in memory of him."

"What does the man say?" asked Mme. de Sérizy.

"Do not touch the axe!" replied Montriveau, and there was menace in the sound of his voice.

"Really, my lord marquis," said Mme. de Langeais, "you tell this old story that everybody knows if they have been to London, and look at my neck in such a melodramatic way that you seem to me to have an axe in your hand."

The duchess was in a cold sweat, but nevertheless she laughed as she spoke the last words.

"But circumstances give the story a quite new application," returned he.

"How so; pray tell me, for pity's sake?"

"In this way, madame—you have touched the axe," said Montriveau, lowering his voice.

"What an enchanting prophecy!" returned she, smiling with assumed grace. "And when is my head to fall?"

"I have no wish to see that pretty head of yours cut off. I only fear some great misfortune for you. If your head were clipped close, would you feel no regrets for the dainty golden hair that you turn to such good account?"

"There are those for whom a woman would love to make such a sacrifice; even if, as often happens, it is for the sake of a man who cannot make allowances for an outbreak of temper."

"Quite so. Well, and if some wag were to spoil your beauty on a sudden by some chemical process, and you, who are but eighteen for us, were to be a hundred years old?"

"Why, the small-pox is our battle of Waterloo, monsieur," she interrupted. "After it is over we find out those who love us sincerely."

"Would you not regret the lovely face that——?"

"Oh! indeed I should, but less for my own sake than for the sake of some one else whose delight it might have been. And, after all, if I were loved, always loved, and truly loved, what would my beauty matter to me? What do you say, Clara?"

"It is a dangerous speculation," replied Mme. de Sérizy.

"Is it permissible to ask his majesty the King of Sorcerers when I made the mistake of touching the axe, since I have not been to London as yet?"

"*Not so*," he answered in English, with a burst of ironical laughter.

"And when will the punishment begin?"

At this Montriveau coolly took out his watch, and ascertained the hour with a truly appalling air of conviction.

"A dreadful misfortune will befall you before this day is out."

"I am not a child to be easily frightened, or rather, I am a child ignorant of danger," said the duchess. "I shall dance now without fear on the edge of the precipice."

"I am delighted to know that you have so much strength of character," he answered, as he watched her go to take her place in a square dance.

But the duchess, in spite of her apparent contempt for Armand's dark prophecies, was really frightened. Her late lover's presence weighed upon her morally and physically with a sense of oppression that scarcely ceased when he left the ballroom. And yet when she had drawn freer breath, and enjoyed the relief for a moment, she found herself regretting the sensation of dread, so greedy of extreme sensations is the feminine nature. The regret was not love, but it was certainly akin to other feelings which prepare the way for love. And then—as if the impression which Montriveau had made upon her were suddenly revived—she recollected his air of conviction as he took out his watch, and in a sudden spasm of dread she went out.

By this time it was about midnight. One of her servants, waiting with her pelisse, went down to order her carriage. On her way home she fell naturally enough to musing over M. de Montriveau's prediction. Arrived in her own courtyard, as she supposed, she entered a vestibule almost like that of her own hotel, and suddenly saw that the staircase was different. She was in a strange house. Turning to call her servants, she was attacked by several men, who rapidly flung a handkerchief over her mouth, bound her hand and foot, and carried her off. She shrieked aloud.

"Madame, our orders are to kill you if you scream," a voice said in her ear.

So great was the duchess' terror that she could never recollect how nor by whom she was transported. When she came to herself she was lying on a couch in a bachelor's lodging, her hands and feet tied with silken cords. In spite of herself, she

shrieked aloud as she looked round and met Armand de Montriveau's eyes. He was sitting in his dressing-gown, quietly smoking a cigar in his armchair.

"Do not cry out, Madame la Duchesse," he said, coolly taking the cigar out of his mouth; "I have a headache. Beside, I will untie you. But listen attentively to what I have the honor to say to you."

Very carefully he untied the knots that bound her feet.

"What would be the use of calling out? Nobody can hear your cries. You are too well bred to make any unnecessary fuss. If you do not stay quietly, if you insist upon a struggle with me, I shall tie your hands and feet again. All things considered, I think that you have self-respect enough to stay on this couch as if you were lying on your own at home; cold as ever, if you will. You have made me shed many tears on this couch, tears that I hid from all other eyes."

While Montriveau was speaking, the duchess glanced about her; it was a woman's glance, a stolen look that saw all things and seemed to see nothing. She was much pleased with the room. It was rather like a monk's cell. The man's character and thoughts seemed to pervade it. No decoration of any kind broke the gray painted surface of the walls. A green carpet covered the floor. A black sofa, a table littered with papers, two big easy-chairs, a chest of drawers with an alarum clock by way of ornament, a very low bedstead with a coverlet flung over it—a red cloth with a black key border—all these things made part of a whole that told of a life reduced to its simplest terms. A triple candle-sconce of Egyptian design on the mantel recalled the vast spaces of the desert and Montriveau's long wanderings; a huge sphinx-claw stood out beneath the folds of stuff at the bedfoot; and, just beyond, a green curtain with a black and scarlet border was suspended by large rings from a spear handle above the door near one corner of the room. The other door by which the band had entered was likewise curtained, but the drapery hung from an

ordinary curtain-rod. As the duchess finally noted that the pattern was the same on both, she saw that the door at the bedfoot stood open; gleams of ruddy light from the room beyond flickered below the fringed border. Naturally, the ominous light roused her curiosity; she fancied she could distinguish strange shapes in the shadows; but as it did not occur to her at the time that danger could come from that quarter, she tried to gratify a more ardent curiosity.

"Monsieur, if it is not indiscreet, may I ask what you mean to do with me?" The insolence and irony of the tone stung through the words. The duchess quite believed that she read extravagant love in Montriveau's speech. He had carried her off; was not that in itself an acknowledgment of her power?

"Nothing whatever, madame," he returned, gracefully puffing the last whiff of cigar smoke. "You will remain here for a short time. First of all, I should like to explain to you what you are, and what I am. I cannot put my thoughts into words whilst you are twisting on the couch in your boudoir; and, beside, in your own house you take offense at the slightest hint, you ring the bell, make an outcry, and turn your lover out at the door as if he were the basest of wretches. Here my mind is unfettered. Here nobody can turn me out. Here you shall be my victim for a few seconds, and you are going to be so exceedingly kind as to listen to me. You need fear nothing. I did not carry you off to insult you, nor yet to take by force what you refused to grant of your own will to my unworthiness. I could not stoop so low. You possibly think of outrage; for myself, I have no such thoughts."

He flung his cigar coolly into the fire.

"The smoke is unpleasant to you, no doubt, madame?" he said, and rising at once, he took a chafing-dish from the hearth, burnt perfumes, and purified the air. The duchess' astonishment was only equaled by her humiliation. She was in this man's power; and he would not abuse his power. The

eyes in which love had once blazed like flame were now quiet and steady as stars. She trembled. Her dread of Armand was increased by a nightmare sensation of restlessness and utter inability to move; she felt as if she were turned to stone. She lay passive in the grip of fear. She thought she saw the light behind the curtains grow to a blaze, as if blown up by a pair of bellows; in another moment the gleams of flame grew brighter, and she fancied that three masked figures suddenly flashed out; but the terrible vision disappeared so swiftly that she took it for an optical delusion.

"Madame," Armand continued with cold contempt, "one minute, just one minute is enough for me, and you shall feel it afterward at every moment throughout your lifetime, the one eternity over which I have power. I am not God. Listen carefully to me," he continued, pausing to add solemnity to his words. "Love will always come at your call. You have boundless power over men: but remember that once you called love, and love came to you; love as pure and true-hearted as may be on earth, and as reverent as it was passionate; fond as a devoted woman's, as a mother's love; a love so great, indeed, that it was past the bounds of reason. You played with it, and you committed a crime. Every woman has a right to refuse herself to love which she feels she cannot share; and if a man loves and cannot win love in return, he is not to be pitied, he has no right to complain. But with a semblance of love to attract an unfortunate creature cut off from all affection; to teach him to understand happiness to the full, only to snatch it from him; to rob him of his future of felicity; to slay his happiness not merely to-day, but as long as his life lasts, by poisoning every hour of it and every thought—this I call a fearful crime!"

"Monsieur——"

"I cannot allow you to answer me yet. So listen to me still. In any case I have rights over you; but I only choose to exercise one—the right of the judge over the criminal, so

that I may arouse your conscience. If you had no conscience left, I should not reproach you at all ; but you are so young ! You must feel some life still in your heart ; or so I like to believe. While I think of you as depraved enough to do a wrong which the law does not punish, I do not think you so degraded that you cannot comprehend the full meaning of my words. I resume."

As he spoke the duchess heard the smothered sound of a pair of bellows. Those mysterious figures which she had just seen were blowing up the fire, no doubt ; the glow shone through the curtain. But Montriveau's lurid face was turned upon her ; she could not choose but wait with a fast-beating heart and eyes fixed in a stare. However curious she felt, the heat in Armand's words interested her even more than the crackling of the mysterious flames.

"Madame," he went on after a pause, "if some poor wretch commits a murder in Paris, it is the executioner's duty, you know, to lay hands on him and stretch him on the plank, where murderers pay for their crimes with their heads. Then the newspapers inform every one, rich and poor, so that the former are assured that they may sleep in peace, and the latter are warned that they must be on the watch if they would live. Well, you that are religious, and even a little of a bigot, may have masses said for such a man's soul. You both belong to the same family, but yours is the elder branch ; and the elder branch may occupy high places in peace and live happily and without cares. Want or anger may drive your brother the convict to take a man's life ; you have taken more, you have taken the joy out of a man's life, you have killed all that was best in his life—his dearest beliefs. The murderer simply lay in wait for his victim, and killed him reluctantly, and in fear of the scaffold ; but *you*—— ! You heaped up every sin that weakness can commit against strength that suspected no evil ; you tamed a passive victim, the better to gnaw his heart out ; you lured him with caresses ; you left nothing

undone that could set him dreaming, imagining, longing for the bliss of love. You asked innumerable sacrifices of him, only to refuse to make any in return. He should see the light indeed before you put out his eyes! It is wonderful how you found the heart to do it! Such villainies demand a display of resource quite above the comprehension of those bourgeois whom you laugh at and despise. They can give and forgive; they know how to love and suffer. The grandeur of their devotion dwarfs us. Rising higher in the social scale, one finds just as much mud as at the lower end; but with this difference, at the upper end it is hard and gilded over.

"Yes, to find baseness in perfection, you must look for a noble bringing up, a great name, a fair woman, a duchess. You cannot fall lower than the lowest unless you are set high above the rest of the world. I express my thoughts badly; the wounds you dealt me are too painful as yet, but do not think that I complain. My words are not the expression of any hope for myself; there is no trace of bitterness in them. Know this, madame, for a certainty—I forgive you. My forgiveness is so complete that you need not feel in the least sorry that you came hither to find it against your will. But you might take advantage of other hearts as childlike as my own, and it is my duty to spare them anguish. So you have inspired the thought of justice. Expiate your sin here on earth; God may perhaps forgive you; I wish that He may, but He is inexorable, and will strike."

The broken-spirited, broken-hearted woman looked up, her eyes filled with tears.

"Why do you cry? Be true to your nature. You could look on indifferently at the torture of a heart as you broke it. That will do, madame, do not cry. I cannot bear it any longer. Other men will tell you that you have given them life; as for myself, I tell you, with rapture, that you have given me blank extinction. Perhaps you guess that I am not my own, that I am bound to live for my friends, that from

this time forth I must endure the cold chill of death, as well as the burden of life? Is it possible that there can be so much kindness in you? Are you like the desert tigress that licks the wounds she has inflicted?"

The duchess burst out sobbing.

"Pray spare your tears, madame. If I believed in them at all, it would merely set me on my guard. Is this another of your artifices? or is it not? You have used so many with me; how can one think that there is any truth in you? Nothing that you do or say has any power now to move me. That is all I have to say."

Mme. de Langeais rose to her feet, with a great dignity and humility in her bearing.

"You are right to treat me very hardly," she said, holding out a hand to the man who did not take it; "you have not spoken harshly enough; and I deserve this punishment."

"I punish you, madame! A man must love still, to punish, must he not? From me you must expect no feeling, nothing resembling it. If I chose, I might be accuser and judge in my cause, and pronounce and carry out the sentence. But I am about to fulfill a duty, not a desire of vengeance of any kind. The cruelest revenge of all, I think, is scorn of revenge when it is in our power to take it. Perhaps I shall be the minister of your pleasures; who knows? Perhaps from this time forth, as you gracefully wear the tokens of disgrace, by which society marks out the criminal, you may perforce learn something of the convict's sense of honor. And then, you will love!"

The duchess sat listening; her meekness was unfeigned; it was no coquettish device. When she spoke at last, it was after a silence.

"Armand," she began, "it seems to me that when I resisted love, I was obeying all the chaste instincts of woman's modesty; I should not have looked for such reproaches from you. I was weak; you have turned all my weaknesses against

me, and made so many crimes of them. How could you fail to understand that the curiosity of love might have carried me further than I ought to go; and that next morning I might be angry with myself, and wretched because I had gone too far? Alas! I sinned in ignorance. I was as sincere in my wrongdoing, I swear to you, as in my remorse. There was far more love for you in my severity than in my concessions. And beside, of what do you complain? I gave you my heart; that was not enough; you demanded, brutally, that I should give my person——”

“Brutally?” repeated Montriveau. But to himself he said, “If I once allow her to dispute over words, I am lost.”

“Yes. You came to me as if I were one of those women. You showed none of the respect, none of the attentions of love. Had I not reason to reflect? Very well, I reflected. The unseemliness of your conduct is not inexcusable, love lay at the source of it; let me think so, and justify you to myself. Well, Armand, this evening, even while you were prophesying evil, I felt convinced that there was happiness in store for us both. Yes, I put my faith in the noble, proud nature so often tested and proved.” She bent lower. “And I was yours wholly,” she murmured in his ear. “I felt a longing that I cannot express to give happiness to a man so violently tried by adversity. If I must have a master, my master should be a great man. As I felt conscious of my height, the less I cared to descend. I felt I could trust you, I saw a whole lifetime of love, while you were pointing to death. Strength and kindness always go together. My friend, you are so strong, you will not be unkind to a helpless woman who loves you. If I was wrong, is there no way of obtaining forgiveness? No way of making reparation? Repentance is the charm of love; I should like to be very charming for you. How could I, alone among women, fail to know a woman’s doubts and fears, the timidity that it is so natural to feel when you bind yourself for life, and know how easily a man snaps such ties? The

bourgeoises, with whom you compared me just now, give themselves, but they struggle first. Very well—I struggled; but here I am! Ah! God, he does not hear me!" she broke off, and wringing her hands, she cried out: "But I love you! I am yours!" and fell at Armand's feet.

"Yours! yours! my one and only master!"

Armand tried to raise her.

"Madame, it is too late! Antoinette cannot save the Duchesse de Langeais. I cannot believe in either. To-day you may give yourself; to-morrow you may refuse. No power in earth or heaven can insure me the sweet constancy of love. All love's pledges lay in the past; and now nothing of that past exists."

The light behind the curtain blazed up so brightly that the duchess could not help turning her head; this time she distinctly saw the three masked figures.

"Armand," she said, "I would not wish to think ill of you. Why are those men there? What are you going to do to me?"

"Those men will be as silent as I myself with regard to the thing which is about to be done. Think of them simply as my hands and my heart. One of them is a surgeon——"

"A surgeon! Armand, my friend, of all things, suspense is the hardest to bear. Just speak; tell me if you wish for my life; I will give it to you, you need not take it——"

"Then you did not understand me? Did I not speak just now of justice? To put an end to your misapprehensions," continued he, taking up a small steel object from the table, "I will now explain what I have decided with regard to you."

He held out a Lorraine cross, fastened to the tip of a steel rod.

"Two of my friends at this very moment are heating another cross, made on this pattern, red-hot. We are going to stamp it upon your forehead, here between the eyes, so that there will be no possibility of hiding the mark with diamonds,

and so avoiding people's questions. In short, you shall bear on your forehead the brand of infamy which your brothers the convicts wear on their shoulders. The pain is a mere trifle, but I feared a nervous crisis of some kind, of resistance——"

"Resistance?" she cried, clapping her hands for joy. "Oh no, no! I would have the whole world here to see. Ah, my Armand, brand her quickly, this creature of yours; brand her with your mark as a poor trifle belonging to you. You asked for pledges of my love; here they are all in one. Ah! for me there is nothing but mercy and forgiveness and eternal happiness in this revenge of yours. When you have marked this woman with your mark, when you set your crimson brand on her, your slave in soul, you can never afterward abandon her, you will be mine for evermore! When you cut me off from my kind, you make yourself responsible for my happiness, or you prove yourself base; and I know that you are noble and great! Why, when a woman loves, the brand of love is burnt into her soul by her own will. Come in, gentlemen! come in and brand her, this Duchesse de Langeais. She is Monsieur de Montriveau's for ever! Ah! come quickly, all of you, my forehead burns hotter than your fire!"

Armand turned his head sharply away lest he should see the duchess kneeling, quivering with the throbbings of her heart. He said some word, and his three friends vanished.

The women of Paris salons know how one mirror reflects another. The duchess, with every motive for reading the depths of Armand's heart, was all eyes; and Armand, all unsuspecting of the mirror, brushed away two tears as they fell. Her whole future lay in those two tears. When he turned round again to help her to rise, she was standing before him, sure of love. Her pulses must have throbbed fast when he spoke with the firmness she had known so well how to use of old while she played with him.

"I spare you, madame. All that has taken place shall be as if it had never been, you may believe me. But now, let

us bid each other farewell. I like to think that you were sincere in you coquetries on your couch, sincere again in this outpouring of your heart. Adieu. I feel that there is no faith in you left in me. You would torment me again; you would always be the duchess, and—— But there, farewell, we shall never understand each other.

“Now, what do you wish?” he continued, taking the tone of a master of the ceremonies—“to return home or to go back to Madame de Sérizy's ball? I have done all in my power to prevent any scandal. Neither your servants nor any one else can possibly know what has passed between us in the last quarter of an hour. Your servants have no idea that you have left the ballroom; your carriage never left Madame de Sérizy's courtyard; your carriage may likewise be found in the court of your own hôtel. Where do you wish to be?”

“What do you counsel, Armand?”

“There is no Armand now, Madame la Duchesse. We are strangers to each other.”

“Then take me to the ball,” she said, still curious to put Armand's power to the test. “Thrust a soul that suffered in the world, and must always suffer there, if there is no happiness for her now, down into hell again. And yet, oh my friend, I love you as your bourgeois love; I love you so that I could come to you and fling my arms about your neck before all the world if you asked it of me. The hateful world has not corrupted me. I am young at least, and I have grown younger still. I am a child, yes, your child, your new creature. Ah! do not drive me forth out of my Eden!”

Armand shook his head.

“Ah! let me take something with me, if I go, some little thing to wear to-night on my heart,” she said, taking possession of Armand's glove, which she twisted into her handkerchief.

“No, I am *not* like all those depraved women. You do

not know the world, and so you cannot know my worth. You shall know it now! There are women who sell themselves for money; there are others to be gained by gifts, it is a vile world! Oh, I wish I were a simple bourgeoisie, a working-girl, if you would rather have a woman beneath you than a woman whose devotion is accompanied by high rank, as men count it. Oh, my Armand, there are noble, high, and chaste and pure natures among us; and then they are lovely indeed. I would have all nobleness that I might offer it all up to you. Misfortune willed that I should be a duchess; I would I were a royal princess, that my offering might be complete. I would be a grisette for you, and a queen for every one beside."

He listened, damping his cigarettes with his lips.

"You will let me know when you wish to go," he said.

"But I should like to stay——"

"That is another matter!"

"Stay, that was badly rolled," she cried, seizing on a cigarette and grasping all that Armand's lips had touched.

"Do you smoke?"

"Oh, what would I not do to please you?"

"Very well. Go, madame."

"I will obey you," she answered, with tears in her eyes.

"You must be blindfolded; you must not see a glimpse of the way."

"I am ready, Armand," she said, bandaging her eyes.

"Can you see?"

"No."

Noiselessly he knelt before her.

"Ah! I can hear you!" she cried, with a little fond gesture, thinking that the pretense of harshness was over.

He made as if he would kiss her lips; she held up her face.

"You can see, madame."

"I am just a little bit curious."

"So you always deceive me?"

"Ah! take off this handkerchief, sir," she cried out, with the passion of a great generosity repelled with scorn, "lead me; I will not open my eyes."

Armand felt sure of her after that cry. He led the way; the duchess, nobly true to her word, was blind. But while Montriveau held her hand as a father might, and led her up and down flights of stairs, he was studying the throbbing pulses of this woman's heart so suddenly invaded by Love. Mme. de Langeais, rejoicing in this power of speech, was glad to let him know all; but he was inflexible; his hand was passive in reply to the questionings of her hand.

At length, after some journey made together, Armand bade her go forward; the opening was doubtless narrow, for as she went she felt that his hand protected her dress. His care touched her; it was a revelation surely that there was a little love still left; yet it was in some sort a farewell, for Montriveau left her without a word. The air was warm; the duchess, feeling the heat, opened her eyes, and found herself standing by the fire in the Comtesse de Sérizy's boudoir. She was alone. Her first thought was for her disordered toilette; in a moment she had adjusted her dress and restored her picturesque coiffure.

"Well, dear Antoinette, we have been looking for you everywhere." It was the Comtesse de Sérizy who spoke as she opened the door.

"I came here to breathe," said the duchess; "it is unbearably hot in the rooms."

"People thought that you had gone; but my brother Ronquerolles told me that your servants were waiting for you."

"I am tired out, dear, let me stay and rest here for a minute," and the duchess sat down on the sofa.

"Why, what is the matter with you? You are shaking from head to foot!"

The Marquis de Ronquerolles came in.

"Madame la Duchesse, I was afraid that something might have happened. I have just come across your coachman, the man is as tipsy as all the Swiss in the whole of the twenty-two cantons."

The duchess made no answer; she was looking round the room, at the mantel and the tall mirrors, seeking the trace of an opening. Then with an extraordinary sensation she recollected that she was again in the midst of the gayety of the ballroom after that terrific scene which had changed the whole course of her life. She began to shiver violently.

"Monsieur de Montriveau's prophecy has shaken my nerves," she said. "It was a joke, but still I will see whether his axe from London will haunt me even in my sleep. So farewell, dear. Adieu, Monsieur le Marquis."

As she went through the rooms she was beset with inquiries and regrets. Her world seemed to have dwindled now that she, its queen, had fallen so low, was so diminished. And what, moreover, were these men compared with him whom she loved with all her heart; with the man grown great by all that she had lost in stature? The giant had regained the height that he had lost for a while, and she exaggerated it perhaps beyond measure. She looked, in spite of herself, at the servant who had attended her to the ball. He was fast asleep.

"Have you been here all the time?" she asked.

"Yes, madame."

As she took her seat in her carriage she saw, in fact, that her coachman was drunk—so drunk, that at any other time she would have been afraid; but after a great crisis in life, fear loses its appetite for common food. She reached home, at any rate, without accident; but even there she felt a change in herself, a new feeling that she could not shake off. For her, there was now but one man in the world; which is to say, that henceforth she cared to shine for his sake alone.

While the philosopher can define love promptly by following out natural laws, the moralist finds a far more perplexing

problem before him if he attempts to consider love in all its developments due to social conditions. Still, in spite of the heresies of the endless sects that divide the church of Love, there is one broad and trenchant line of difference in doctrine, a line that all the discussion in the world can never deflect. A rigid application of this line explains the nature of the crisis through which the duchess, like most women, was to pass. Passion she knew, but she did not love as yet.

Love and passion are two different conditions which poets and men of the world, philosophers and fools alike, continually confound. Love implies a give and take, a certainty of bliss that nothing can change; it means so close a clinging of the heart, and an exchange of happiness so constant, that there is no room left for jealousy. Then possession is a means and not an end; unfaithfulness may give pain, but the bond is not the less close; the soul is neither more nor less ardent or troubled, but happy at every moment; in short, the divine breath of desire spreading from end to end of the immensity of Time steeps it all for us in the selfsame hue; life takes the tint of the unclouded heaven. But Passion is the foreshadowing of Love, and of that Infinite to which all suffering souls aspire. Passion is a hope that may be cheated. Passion means both suffering and transition. Passion dies out when hope is dead. Men and women may pass through this experience many times without dishonor, for it is so natural to spring toward happiness; but there is only one love in a lifetime. All discussions of sentiment ever conducted on paper or by word of mouth may, therefore, be resumed by two questions—"Is it passion? Is it love?" So, since love comes into existence only through the intimate experience of the bliss which gives it lasting life, the duchess was beneath the yoke of passion as yet; and as she knew the fierce tumult, the unconscious calculations, the fevered cravings, and all that is meant by that word *passion*—she suffered. Through all the trouble of her soul there rose eddying gusts of tempest, raised

by vanity or self-love, or pride or a high spirit ; for all these forms of egoism make common cause together.

She had said to this man : " I love you ; I am yours ! " Was it possible that the Duchesse de Langeais should have uttered those words—in vain ? She must either be loved now or play her part of queen no longer. And then she felt the loneliness of the luxurious couch where pleasure had never yet set his glowing feet ; and over and over again, while she tossed and writhed there, she said : " I want to be loved."

But the belief that she still had in herself gave her hope of success. The duchess might be piqued, the vain Parisienne might be humiliated ; but the woman saw glimpses of wedded happiness, and imagination, avenging the time lost for nature, took a delight in kindling the inextinguishable fire in her veins. She all but attained to the sensations of love ; for amid her poignant doubt whether she was loved in return, she felt glad at heart to say to herself : " I love him ! " As for her scruples, religion, and the world, she could trample them under foot ! Montriveau was her religion now. She spent the next day in a state of moral torpor, troubled by a physical unrest, which no words could express. She wrote letters and tore them all up in turn, and invented a thousand and one impossible fancies.

When M. de Montriveau's usual hour arrived, she tried to think that he would come, and enjoyed the feeling of expectation. Her whole life was concentrated in the single sense of hearing. Sometimes she shut her eyes, straining her ears to listen through space, wishing that she could annihilate everything that lay between her and her lover, and so establish that perfect silence which sounds may traverse from afar. In her tense self-concentration, the ticking of the clock grew hateful to her ; she stopped its ill-omened garrulity. The twelve strokes of midnight sounded from the drawing-room.

" Ah, God ! " she cried, " to see him here would be happiness. And yet, it is not so very long since he came here,

brought by desire, and the tones of his voice filled this boudoir. And now there is nothing."

She remembered the times that she had played the coquette with him, and how that her coquetry had cost her her lover, and the despairing tears flowed for long.

Her woman came at length with, "Madame la Duchesse does not know, perhaps, that it is two o'clock in the morning; I thought that madame was not feeling well."

"Yes, I am going to bed," said the duchess, drying her eyes. "But remember, Suzanne, never to come in again without orders; I tell you this for the last time."

For a week, Mme. de Langeais went to every house where there was a hope of meeting M. de Montriveau. Contrary to her usual habits, she came early and went late; gave up dancing, and went to the card-tables. Her experiments were fruitless. She did not succeed in getting a glimpse of Armand. She did not dare to utter his name now. One evening, however, in a fit of despair, she spoke to Mme. de Sérizy, and asked as carelessly as she could: "You must have quarreled with Monsieur de Montriveau? He is not to be seen at your house now."

The countess laughed. "So he does not come here either?" she returned. "He is not to be seen anywhere, for that matter. He is interested in some woman, no doubt."

"I used to think that the Marquis de Ronquerolles was one of his friends——" the duchess began sweetly.

"I have never heard my brother say that he was acquainted with him."

Mme. de Langeais did not reply. Mme. de Sérizy concluded from the duchess' silence that she might apply the scourge with impunity to a discreet friendship which she had all too plainly seen, with much bitterness of soul, for a long time past.

"So you miss that melancholy personage, do you? I have heard most extraordinary things of him. Wound his feelings,

he never comes back, he forgives nothing; and, if you love him, he keeps you in chains. To everything that I said of him, one of those that praise him sky-high would always answer: 'He knows how to love!' People are always telling me that Montriveau would give up all for his friend; that his is a great nature. Pooh! society does not want such tremendous natures. Men of that stamp are all very well at home; let them stay there and leave us to our pleasant little-nesses. What do you say, Antoinette?"

Woman of the world though she was, the duchess seemed agitated, yet she replied in a natural voice that deceived her fair friend:

"I am sorry to miss him. I took a great interest in him, and promised to myself to be his sincere friend. I like great natures, dear friend, ridiculous though you may think it. To give one's self to a fool is a clear confession, is it not, that one is governed wholly by one's senses?"

Mme. de Sérizy's "preferences" had always been for commonplace men; her lover at the moment, the Marquis d'Aiglemont, was a fine, tall man.

After this, the countess soon took her departure, you may be sure. Mme. de Langeais saw hope in Armand's withdrawal from the world; she wrote to him at once; it was a humble, gentle letter, surely it would bring him if he loved her still. She sent her footman with it next day. On the servant's return, she asked whether he had given the letter to M. de Montriveau himself, and could not restrain the movement of joy at the affirmative answer. Armand was in Paris! He stayed alone in his house; he did not go out into society! So she was loved! All day long she waited for an answer that never came. Again and again, when impatience grew unbearable, Antoinette found reasons for his delay. Armand felt embarrassed; the reply would come by mail; but night came, and she could not deceive herself any longer. It was a dreadful day, a day of pain grown sweet, of intolerable heart-

throbs, a day when the heart squanders the very forces of life in riot.

Next day she sent for an answer.

"Monsieur le Marquis sent word that he would call on Madame la Duchesse," reported Julien.

She fled lest her happiness should be seen in her face, and flung herself on her couch to devour her first sensations.

"He is coming!"

The thought rent her soul. And, in truth, woe unto those for whom suspense is not the most horrible time of tempest, while it increases and multiplies the sweetest joys; for they have nothing in them of that flame which quickens the images of things, giving to them a second existence, so that we cling as closely to the pure essence as to its outward and visible manifestation. What is suspense in love but a constant drawing upon an unfailing hope?—a submission to the terrible scourgings of passion, while passion is yet happy, and the disenchantment of reality has not set in. The constant putting forth of strength and longing, called suspense, is surely, to the human soul, as fragrance to the flower that breathes it forth. We soon leave the brilliant, unsatisfying colors of tulips and coreopsis, but we turn again and again to drink in the sweetness of orange-blossoms or volkameria—flowers compared separately, each in its own land, to a betrothed bride, full of love, made fair by the past and future.

The duchess learned the joys of this new life of hers through the rapture with which she received the scourgings of love. As this change wrought in her, she saw other destinies before her, and a better meaning in the things of life. As she hurried to her dressing-room, she understood what studied adornment and the most minute attention to her toilet mean when these are undertaken for love's sake and not for vanity. Even now this making ready helped her to bear the long time of waiting. A relapse of intense agitation set in when she was dressed; she passed through nervous paroxysms brought on

by the dreadful power which sets the whole mind in ferment. Perhaps that power is only a disease, though the pain of it is sweet. The duchess was dressed and waiting at two o'clock in the afternoon. At half-past eleven that night M. de Montriveau had not arrived. To try to give an idea of the anguish endured by a woman who might be said to be the spoilt child of civilization would be to attempt to say how many imaginings the heart can condense into one thought. As well endeavor to measure the forces expended by the soul in a sigh whenever the bell rang; to estimate the drain of life when a carriage rolled past without stopping, and left her prostrate.

"Can he be playing with me?" she said, as the clock struck midnight.

She grew white; her teeth chattered; she struck her hands together and leapt up and crossed the boudoir, recollecting as she did so how often he had come thither without a summons. But she resigned herself. Had she not seen him grow pale, and start up under the stinging barbs of her irony? Then Mme. de Langeais felt the horror of the woman's appointed lot; a man's is the active part, a woman must wait passively when she loves. If a woman goes beyond her beloved, she makes a mistake which few men can forgive; almost every man would feel that a woman lowers herself by this piece of angelic flattery. But Armand's was a great nature; he surely must be one of the very few who can repay such exceeding love by love that lasts for ever.

"Well, I will make the advance," she told herself, as she tossed on her bed and found no sleep there; "I will go to him. I will not weary myself with holding out a hand to him, but I will hold it out. A man of a thousand will see a promise of love and constancy in every step that a woman takes toward him. Yes, the angels must come down from heaven to reach men; and I wish to be an angel for him."

Next day she wrote. It was a billet of the kind in which the intellects of the ten thousand Sévigné's that Paris now can

number particularly excel. And yet only a Duchesse de Langeais, brought up by Mme. la Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, could have written that delicious note; no other woman could complain without lowering herself; could spread wings in such a flight without dragging her pinions in humiliation; rise gracefully in revolt; scold without giving offense; and pardon without compromising her personal dignity.

Julien went with the note. Julien, like his kind, was the victim of love's marches and countermarches.

"What did Monsieur de Montriveau reply?" she asked, as indifferently as she could, when the man came back to report himself.

"Monsieur le Marquis requested me to tell Madame la Duchesse that it was all right."

Oh the dreadful reaction of the soul upon herself! To have her heart stretched on the rack before curious witnesses; yet not to utter a sound, to be forced to keep silence! One of the countless miseries of the rich!

More than three weeks went by. Mme. de Langeais wrote again and again, and no answer came from Montriveau. At last she gave out that she was ill, to gain a dispensation from attendance on the princess and from social duties. She was only at home to her father the Duc de Navarreins, her aunt the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, the old Vidame de Pamiers (her maternal great-uncle), and to her husband's uncle, the Duc de Grandlieu. These persons found no difficulty in believing that the duchess was ill, seeing that she grew thinner and paler and more dejected every day. The vague ardor of love, the smart of wounded pride, the continual prick of the only scorn that could touch her, the yearnings toward joys that she craved with a vain continual longing—all these things told upon her, mind and body; all the forces of her nature were stimulated to no purpose. She was paying the arrears of her life of make-believe.

She went out at last to a review. M. de Montriveau was to

be there. For the duchess, on the balcony of the Tuileries with the royal family, it was one of those festival days that are long remembered. She looked supremely beautiful in her languor; she was greeted with admiration in all eyes. It was Montriveau's presence that made her so fair. Once or twice they exchanged glances. The general came almost to her feet in all the glory of that soldier's uniform, which produces an effect upon the feminine imagination to which the most prudish will confess. When a woman is very much in love, and has not seen her lover for two months, such a swift moment must be something like the phase of a dream when the eyes embrace a world that stretches away forever. Only women or young men can imagine the dull, frenzied hunger in the duchess' eyes. As for older men, if during the paroxysms of early passion in youth they had experience of such phenomena of nervous power; at a later day it is so completely forgotten that they deny the very existence of the luxuriant ecstasy—the only name that can be given to these wonderful intuitions. Religious ecstasy is the aberration of a soul that has shaken off its bonds of flesh; whereas in amorous ecstasy all the forces of soul and body are embraced and blended in one. If a woman falls a victim to the tyrannous frenzy before which Mme. de Langeais was forced to bend, she will take one decisive resolution after another so swiftly that it is impossible to give account of them. Thought after thought rises and flits across her brain, as clouds are whirled by the wind across the gray veil of mist that shuts out the sun. Thenceforth the facts reveal all. And the facts are these:

The day after the review, Mme. de Langeais sent her carriage and liveried servants to wait at the Marquis de Montriveau's door from eight o'clock in the morning till three in the afternoon. Armand lived in the Rue de Tournon, a few steps away from the Chamber of Peers, and that very day the House was sitting; but long before the peers returned to their palaces, several people had recognized the duchess' carriage

and liveries. The first of these was the Baron de Maulincour. That young officer had met with disdain from Mme. de Langeais and a better reception from Mme. de Sérizy; he betook himself at once therefore to his mistress, and under seal of secrecy told her of this strange freak.

In a moment the news was spread with telegraphic speed through all the coteries in the Faubourg Saint-Germain; it reached the Tuileries and the Élysée-Bourbon; it was the sensation of the day, the matter of all the talk from noon till night. Almost everywhere the women denied the facts, but in such a manner that the report was confirmed; the men one and all believed it, and manifested a most indulgent interest in Mme. de Langeais. Some among them threw the blame on Armand.

"That savage of a Montriveau is a man of bronze," said they; "he insisted on making this scandal, no doubt."

"Very well, then," others replied, "Madame de Langeais has been guilty of a most generous piece of imprudence. To renounce the world, and rank, and fortune, and consideration for her lover's sake, and that in the face of all Paris, is as fine a *coup d'état* for a woman as that barber's knife-thrust, which so affected Canning in a court of assize. Not one of the women who blame the duchess would make a declaration worthy of ancient times. It is heroic of Madame de Langeais to proclaim herself so frankly. Now there is nothing left to her but to love Montriveau. There must be something great about a woman if she says: 'I will have but one passion.'"

"But what is to become of society, monsieur, if you honor vice in this way without respect for virtue?" asked the Comtesse de Granville, the attorney-general's wife.

While the château, the faubourg, and the Chaussée d'Antin were discussing the shipwreck of aristocratic virtue; while excited young men rushed about on horseback to make sure that the carriage was standing in the Rue de Tournon, and the duchess in consequence was beyond a doubt in M. de

Montriveau's rooms, Mme. de Langeais, with heavy throbbing pulses, was lying hidden away in her boudoir. And Armand? he had been out all night, and at that moment was walking with M. de Marsay in the gardens of the Tuileries. The elder members of Mme. de Langeais' family were engaged in calling upon one another, arranging to read her a homily and to hold a consultation as to the best way of putting a stop to the scandal.

At three o'clock, therefore, M. le Duc de Navarreins, the Vidame de Pamiers, the old Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, and the Duc de Grandlieu were assembled in Mme. la Duchesse de Langeais' drawing-room. To them, as to all curious inquirers, the servants said that their mistress was not at home; the duchess had made no exceptions to her orders. But these four personages shone conspicuous in that lofty sphere, of which the revolutions and hereditary pretensions are solemnly recorded year by year in the "*Almanach de Gotha*," wherefore without some slight sketch of each of them this picture of society were incomplete.

The Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry, in the feminine world, was a most poetic wreck of the reign of Louis Quinze. In her beautiful prime, so it was said, she had done her part to win for that monarch his appellation of *le Bien-aimé* (the well-beloved). Of her past charms of feature, little remained save a remarkably prominent slender nose, curved like a Turkish scimitar, now the principal ornament of a countenance that put you in mind of an old white glove. Add a few powdered curls, high-heeled pantoufles, a cap with upstanding loops of lace, black mittens, and a decided taste for *ombre*. But to do full justice to the lady, it must be said that she appeared in low-necked gowns of an evening (so high an opinion of her ruins had she), wore long gloves, and reddened her cheeks with Martin's classic rouge. An appalling amiability in her wrinkles, a prodigious brightness in the old lady's eyes, a profound dignity in her whole person, together with the triple

barbed wit of her tongue, and an infallible memory in her head, made of her a real power in the land. The whole Cabinet des Chartes was entered in duplicate on the parchment of her brain. She knew all the genealogies of every noble house in Europe—princes, dukes, and counts—and could put her hand on the last descendants of Charlemagne in the direct line. No usurpation of title could escape the Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry.

Young men who wished to stand well at Court, ambitious men, and young married women paid her assiduous homage. Her salon set the tone of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The words of this Talleyrand in petticoats were taken as final decrees. People came to consult her on questions of etiquette or usages, or to take lessons in good taste. And, in truth, no other old woman could put back her snuff-box in her pocket as the princess could; while there was a precision and a grace about the movements of her skirts, when she sat down or crossed her feet, which drove the finest ladies of the young generation to despair. Her voice had remained in her head during one-third of her lifetime; but she could not prevent a descent into the membranes of the nose, which lent to it a peculiar expressiveness. She still retained a hundred and fifty thousand francs of her great fortune, for Napoleon had generously returned her woods to her; so that personally and in the matter of possessions she was a woman of no little consequence.

This curious antique, seated in a low chair by the fireside, was chatting with the Vidame de Pamiers, a contemporary ruin. The vidame* was a big, tall, and spare man, a lord of the old school, and had been a commander of the order of Malta. His neck had always been so tightly compressed by a strangulation stock that his cheeks pouched over it a little, and he held his head high; to many people this would have

* A feudal title of those holding the estates of a bishopric on condition of defending them.

given an air of self-sufficiency, but in the *vidame* it was justified by a *Voltairean* wit. His wide prominent eyes seemed to see everything, and as a matter of fact there was not much that they had not seen. Altogether, his person was a perfect model of aristocratic outline, slim and slender, supple and agreeable. He seemed as if he could be pliant or rigid at will, and twist and bend, or rear his head like a snake.

The Duc de Navarreins was pacing up and down the room with the Duc de Grandlieu. Both were men of fifty-six or thereabout, and still hale; both were short, corpulent, flourishing, somewhat florid-complexioned men with jaded eyes, and lower lips that had begun to hang already. But for an exquisite refinement of accent, an urbane courtesy, and an ease of manner that could change in a moment to insolence, a superficial observer might have taken them for a couple of bankers. Any such mistake would have been impossible, however, if the listener could have heard them converse, and seen them on their guard with men whom they feared, vapid and commonplace with their equals, slippery with their inferiors, whom courtiers and statesmen know how to tame by a tactful word or to humiliate with an unexpected phrase.

Such were the representatives of the great noblesse that determined to perish rather than submit to any change. It was a noblesse that deserved praise and blame in equal measure; a noblesse that will never be judged impartially until some poet shall arise to tell how joyfully the nobles obeyed the King though their heads fell under a Richelieu's axe, and how deeply they scorned the guillotine of '89 as a foul revenge.

Another noticeable trait in all the four was a thin voice that agreed peculiarly well with their ideas and bearing. Among themselves, at any rate, they were on terms of perfect equality. None of them betrayed any sign of annoyance over the duchess' escapade, but all of them had learned at Court to hide their feelings.

And here, lest critics should condemn the puerility of the opening of the forthcoming scene, it is perhaps as well to remind the reader that Locke, once happening to be in the company of several great lords, renowned no less for their wit than for their breeding and political consistency, wickedly amused himself by taking down their conversation by some shorthand process of his own; and afterward, when he read it over to them to see what they could make of it, they all burst out laughing. And, in truth, the tinsel jargon which circulates among the upper ranks in every country yields mighty little gold to the crucible when washed in the ashes of literature or philosophy. In every rank of society (some few Parisian salons excepted) the curious observer finds folly a constant quantity beneath a more or less transparent varnish. Conversation with any substance in it is a rare exception, and bæotianism is current coin in every zone. In the higher regions they must perforce talk more, but to make up for it they think the less. Thinking is a tiring exercise, and the rich like their lives to flow by easily and without effort. It is by comparing the fundamental matter of jests, as you rise in the social scale from the street-boy to the peer of France, that the observer arrives at a true comprehension of M. de Talleyrand's maxim: "The manner is everything;" an elegant rendering of the legal axiom: "The form is of more consequence than the matter." In the eyes of the poet the advantage rests with the lower classes, for they seldom fail to give a certain character of rude poetry to their thoughts. Perhaps also this same observation may explain the sterility of the salons, their emptiness, their shallowness, and the repugnance felt by men of ability for bartering their ideas for such pitiful small change.

The duke suddenly stopped as if some bright idea occurred to him, and remarked to his neighbor—

"So you have sold Tornthon?"

"No, he is ill. I am very much afraid I shall lose him,

and I should be uncommonly sorry. He is a very good hunter. Do you know how the Duchesse de Marigny is?"

"No. I did not go this morning. I was just going out to call when you came in to speak about Antoinette. But yesterday she was very ill indeed; they had given her up, she took the sacrament."

"Her death will make a change in your cousin's position."

"Not at all. She gave away her property in her lifetime, only keeping an annuity. She made over the Guébriant estate to her niece, Madame de Soulanges, subject to a yearly charge."

"It will be a great loss for society. She was a kind woman. Her family will miss her; her experience and advice carried weight. Her son Marigny is an amiable man; he has a sharp wit; he can talk. He is pleasant, very pleasant. Pleasant? oh, that no one can deny, but—ill regulated to the last degree. Well, and yet it is an extraordinary thing, he is very acute. He was dining at the club the other day with that moneyed Chaussée-d'Antin set. Your uncle (he always goes there for his game of cards) found him there to his astonishment, and asked if he was a member. 'Yes,' said he, 'I don't go into society now; I am living among the bankers.' You know why?" added the marquis, with a meaning smile.

"No," said the duke.

"He is smitten with that little Madame Keller, Gondreville's daughter; she is only lately married, and has a great vogue, they say, in that set."

"Well, Antoinette does not find time heavy on her hands, it seems," remarked the vidame.

"My affection for that little woman has driven me to find a singular pastime," replied the princess, as she returned her snuff-box to her pocket.

"Dear aunt, I am extremely vexed," said the duke, stopping short in his walk. "Nobody but one of Bonaparte's men could ask such an indecorous thing of a woman of

fashion. Between ourselves, Antoinette might have made a better choice."

"The Montriveaus are a very old family and very well connected, my dear," replied the princess; "they are related to all the noblest houses of Burgundy. If the Dulmen branch of the Arschoot-Rivaoudoult should come to an end in Galicia, the Montriveaus would succeed to the Arschoot title and estates. They inherit through their great-grandfather."

"Are you sure?"

"I know it better than this Montriveau's father did. I told him about it, I used to see a good deal of him; and, chevalier of several orders though he was, he only laughed; he was an encyclopædist. But his brother turned the relationship to good account during the emigration. I have heard it said that his northern kinsfolk were most kind in every way——"

"Yes, to be sure. The Comte de Montriveau died at St. Petersburg," said the vidame. "I met him there. He was a big man with an incredible passion for oysters."

"How many did he ever eat?" asked the Duc de Grand-lieu.

"Ten dozen every day."

"And did they not disagree with him?"

"Not the least bit in the world."

"Why, that is extraordinary! Had he neither the stone nor gout, nor any other complaint, in consequence?"

"No; his health was perfectly good, and he died through an accident."

"By accident! Nature prompted him to eat oysters, so probably he required them; for up to a certain point our predominant tastes are conditions of our existence."

"I am of your opinion," said the princess, with a smile.

"Madame, you always put a malicious construction on things," returned the marquis.

"I only want you to understand that these remarks might

leave a wrong impression on a young woman's mind," said she, and interrupted herself to exclaim, "But this niece, this niece of mine!"

"Dear aunt, I still refuse to believe that she can have gone to Monsieur de Montriveau," said the Duc de Navarreins.

"Bah!" returned the princess.

"What do you think, vidame!" asked the marquis.

"If the duchess were an artless simpleton I should think that——"

"But when a woman is in love she becomes an artless simpleton," retorted the princess. "Really, my poor vidame, you must be getting older."

"After all, what is to be done?" asked the duke.

"If my dear niece is wise," said the princess, "she will go to Court this evening—fortunately, to-day is Monday, and reception day—and you must see that we all rally round her and give the lie to this absurd rumor. There are hundreds of ways of explaining things; and if the Marquis de Montriveau is a gentleman, he will come to our assistance. We will bring these children to listen to reason——"

"But, dear aunt, it is not easy to tell Monsieur de Montriveau the truth to his face. He is one of Bonaparte's pupils, and he has a position. Why, he is one of the great men of the day; he is high up in the Guards, and very useful there. He has not a spark of ambition. He is just the man to say: 'Here is my commission, leave me in peace,' if the King should say a word that he did not like."

"Then, pray, what are his opinions?"

"Very unsound."

"Really," sighed the princess, "the King is, as he always has been, a Jacobin under the lilies of France."

"Oh! not quite so bad," said the vidame.

"Yes; I have known him for a long while. The man that pointed out the Court to his wife on the occasion of her first State dinner in public with: 'These are our people,' could

only be a black-hearted scoundrel. I can see monsieur exactly the same as ever in the King. The bad brother who voted so wrongly in his department of the Constituent Assembly was sure to compound with the Liberals and allow them to argue and talk. This philosophical cant will be just as dangerous now for the younger brother as it used to be for the elder; this fat man with the little mind is amusing himself by creating difficulties, and how his successor is to get out of them I do not know; he holds his younger brother in abhorrence; he would be glad to think as he lay dying: 'He will not reign very long——' "

"Aunt, he is the King, and I have the honor to be in his service——"

"But does your post take away your right of free speech, my dear? You come of quite as good a house as the Bourbons. If the Guises had shown a little more resolution, his majesty would be a nobody at this day. It is time I went out of this world, the noblesse is dead. Yes, it is all over with you, my children," she continued, looking as she spoke at the vidame. "What has my niece done that the whole town should be talking about her? She is in the wrong; I disapprove of her conduct, a useless scandal is a blunder; that is why I still have my doubts about this want of regard for appearances; I brought her up, and I know that——"

Just at that moment the duchess came out of her boudoir. She had recognized her aunt's voice and heard the name of Montriveau. She was still in her loose morning-wrapper; and even as she came in, M. de Grandlieu, looking carelessly out of the window, saw his niece's carriage driving back along the street. The duke took his daughter's face in both hands and kissed her on the forehead. "So, dear girl," he said, "you do not know what is going on?"

"Has anything extraordinary happened, father dear?"

"Why, all Paris believes that you are with Monsieur de Montriveau."

"My dear Antoinette, you were at home all the time, were you not?" said the princess, holding out a hand, which the duchess kissed with affectionate respect.

"Yes, dear mother; I was at home all the time. And," she added, as she turned to greet the vidame and the marquis, "I wished that all Paris should think that I was with Monsieur de Montriveau."

The duke flung up his hands, struck them together in despair, and folded his arms.

"Then, cannot you see what will come of this mad freak?" he asked at last.

But the aged princess had suddenly risen and stood looking steadily at the duchess; the younger woman flushed and her eyes fell. Mme. de Chauvry gently drew her closer, and said: "My little angel, let me kiss you!"

She kissed her niece very affectionately on the forehead, and continued smiling, while she held her hand in a tight clasp.

"We are not under the Valois now, dear child. You have compromised your husband and your position. Still, we will arrange to make everything right."

"But, dear aunt, I do not wish to make it right at all. It is my wish that all Paris should say that I was with Monsieur de Montriveau this morning. If you destroy that belief, however ill-grounded it may be, you will do me a singular disservice."

"Do you really wish to ruin yourself, child, and to grieve your family?"

"My family, father, unintentionally condemned me to irreparable misfortune when they sacrificed me to family considerations. You may, perhaps, blame me for seeking alleviations, but you will certainly feel for me."

"After all the endless pains you take to settle your daughters suitably!" muttered M. de Navarreins, addressing the vidame.

The princess shook a stray grain of snuff from her skirts. "My dear little girl," she said, "be happy, if you can. We are not talking of troubling your felicity, but of reconciling it with social usages. We all of us here assembled know that marriage is a defective institution tempered by love. But when you take a lover, is there any need to make your bed in the Place du Carrousel? See now, just be a bit reasonable, and hear what we have to say."

"I am listening."

"Madame la Duchesse," began the Duc de Grandlieu, "if it were any part of an uncle's duty to look after his nieces, he ought to have a position; society would owe him honors and rewards and a salary, exactly as if he were in the King's service. So I am not here to talk about my nephew, but of your own interests. Let us look ahead a little. If you persist in making a scandal—I have seen the animal before, and I own that I have no great liking for him—Langeais is stingy enough, and he does not care a rap for any one but himself; he will have a separation; he will stick to your money, and leave you poor, and consequently you will be a nobody. The income of a hundred thousand francs that you have just inherited from your maternal great-aunt will go to pay for his mistresses' amusements. You will be bound and gagged by the law; you will have to say Amen to all these arrangements. Suppose Monsieur de Montriveau leaves you—— dear me! do not let us put ourselves in a passion, my dear niece; a man does not leave a woman while she is young and pretty; still, we have seen so many pretty women left disconsolate, even among princesses, that you will permit the supposition, an all but impossible supposition I quite wish to believe—— Well, suppose that he goes, what will become of you without a husband? Keep well with your husband as you take care of your beauty; for beauty, after all, is a woman's paraclete, and a husband also stands between you and worse. I am supposing that you are happy and loved to the end, and I am

leaving unpleasant or unfortunate events altogether out of the reckoning. This being so, fortunately or unfortunately, you may have children. What are they to be? Montriveaus? Very well; they certainly will not succeed to their father's whole fortune. You will want to give them all that you have; he will wish to do the same. Nothing more natural, dear me! And you will find the law against you. How many times have we seen heirs-at-law bringing a lawsuit to recover the property from illegitimate children? Every court of law rings with such actions all over the world. You will create a *fidei commissum* perhaps; and if the trustee betrays your confidence, your children have no remedy against him; and they are ruined. So choose carefully. You see the perplexities of the position. In every possible way your children will be sacrificed of necessity to the fancies of your heart; they will have no recognized status. While they are little they will be charming; but, Lord! some day they will reproach you for thinking of no one but your two selves. We old gentlemen know all about it. Little boys grow up into men, and men are ungrateful beings. When I was in Germany, did I not hear young de Horn say, after supper: 'If my mother had been an honest woman, I should be prince-regnant!' 'If?' We have spent our lives in hearing plebeians say *if*. *If* brought about the Revolution. When a man cannot lay the blame on his father or mother, he holds God responsible for his hard lot. In short, dear child, we are here to open your eyes. I will say all I have to say in a few words, on which you had better meditate: A woman ought never to put her husband in the right."

"Uncle, so long as I cared for nobody, I could calculate; I looked at interests then, as you do; now, I can only feel."

"But, my dear little girl," remonstrated the vidame, "life is simply a complication of interests and feelings; to be happy, more particularly in your position, one must try to reconcile one's feelings with one's interests. A grisette may love ac-

cording to her fancy, that is intelligible enough, but you have a pretty fortune, a family, a name and a place at Court, and you ought not to fling them out of the window. And what have we been asking you to do to keep them all? To manœuvre carefully instead of falling foul of social conventions. Lord! I shall very soon be eighty years old, and I cannot recollect, under any régime, a love worth the price that you are willing to pay for the love of this lucky young man."

The duchess silenced the vidame with a look; if Montriveau could have seen that glance, he would have forgiven all.

"It would be very effective on the stage," remarked the Duc de Grandlieu, "but it all amounts to nothing when your jointure and position and independence are concerned. You are not grateful, my dear niece. You will not find many families where the relatives have courage enough to teach the wisdom gained by experience, and to make rash young heads listen to reason. Renounce your salvation in two minutes, if it pleases you to damn yourself; well and good; but reflect well beforehand when it comes to renouncing your income. I know of no confessor who remits the pains of poverty. I have a right, I think, to speak in this way to you; for if you are ruined, I am the one person who can offer you a refuge. I am almost an uncle to Langeais, and I alone have the right to put him in the wrong."

The Duc de Navarreins roused himself from painful reflections.

"Since you speak of feeling, my child," he said, "let me remind you that a woman who bears your name ought to be moved by sentiments which do not touch ordinary people. Can you wish to give an advantage to the Liberals, to those jesuits of Robespierre's that are doing all they can to vilify the noblesse? Some things a Navarreins cannot do without failing in duty to his house. You would not be alone in your dishonor——"

"Come, come!" said the princess. "Dishonor? Do not

make such a fuss about the journey of an empty carriage, children, and leave me alone with Antoinette. All three of you come and dine with me. I will undertake to properly arrange matters. You men understand nothing; you are beginning to talk sourly already, and I have no wish to see a quarrel between you and my dear child. Do me the pleasure of going."

The three gentlemen probably guessed the princess' intentions; they took their leave. M. de Navarreins kissed his daughter on the forehead with: "Come, be good, dear child. It is not too late yet if you choose."

"Couldn't we find some good fellow in the family to pick a quarrel with this Montriveau?" said the vidame, as they went downstairs.

When the two women were alone, the princess beckoned her niece to a little low chair by her side.

"My pearl," said she, "in this world below, I know nothing worse calumniated than God and the Eighteenth Century; for as I look back over my own young days, I do not recollect that a single duchess trampled the proprieties under foot as you have just done. Novelists and scribblers brought the reign of Louis XV. into disrepute. Do not believe them. The du Barry, my dear, was quite as good as the Widow Scarron, and the more agreeable woman of the two. In my time a woman could keep her dignity among her gallantries. Indiscretion was the ruin of us, and the beginning of all the mischief. The philosophists—the nobodies whom we admitted into our salons—had no more gratitude or sense of decency than to make an inventory of our hearts, to traduce us one and all, and to rail against the age by way of a return for our kindness. The people are not in a position to judge of anything whatsoever; they looked at the facts, not at the form. But the men and women of those times, my heart, were quite as remarkable as at any other period of the Monarchy. Not one of your Werthers, none of your notabilities, as they are

called, never a one of your men in yellow kid gloves and trousers that disguise the poverty of their legs, would cross Europe in the dress of a traveling hawker to brave the daggers of a Duke of Modena, and to shut himself up in the dressing-room of the Regent's daughter at the risk of his life. Not one of your little consumptive patients with their tortoise-shell eyeglasses would hide himself in a closet for six weeks, like Lauzun, to keep up his mistress' courage while she was lying-in of her child. There was more passion in Monsieur de Jaucourt's little finger than in your whole race of higglers that leave a woman to better themselves elsewhere! Just tell me where to find the page that would be cut in pieces and buried under the floor boards for one kiss on the Königs-mark's gloved finger.

"Really, it would seem to-day that the roles are exchanged, and women are expected to show their devotion for men. These modern gentlemen are worth less, yet think more of themselves. Believe me, my dear, all these adventures that have been made public, and now are turned against our good Louis XV., were kept quite secret at first. If it had not been for a pack of poetasters, scribblers, and moralists, who hung about our waiting-women, and penned their slanders, our epoch would have appeared in literature as a well-conducted age. I am justifying the century and not its fringe. Perhaps a hundred women of quality were lost; but for every one, the rogues set down ten, like the gazettes after a battle when they count up the losses of the beaten side. And in any case I do not know that the Revolution and the Empire can reproach us; they were coarse, dull, licentious times. Faugh! it is revolting.

"Those are the brothels of French history.

"This preamble, my dear child," she continued after a pause, "brings me to the thing that I have to say. If you care for Montriveau, you are quite at liberty to love him at your ease, and as much as you can. I know by experience

that, unless you are locked up (but locking people up is out of fashion now), you will do as you please; I should have done the same at your age. Only, sweet heart, I should not have given up my right to be the mother of future Ducs de Langeais. So mind appearances. The vidame is right. No man is worth a single one of the sacrifices which we are foolish enough to make for their love. Put yourself in such a position that you may still be Monsieur de Langeais' wife, in case you should have the misfortune to repent. When you are an old woman, you will be very glad to hear mass said at Court, and not in some provincial convent. Therein lies the whole question. A single imprudence means an allowance and a wandering life; it means that you are at the mercy of your lover; it means that you must put up with insolence from women that are not so honest, precisely because they have been very vulgarly sharp-witted. It would be a hundred times better to go to Montriveau's at night in a cab, and disguised, instead of sending your carriage in broad daylight. You are a little simpleton, my dear child! Your carriage flattered his vanity; your person would have ensnared his heart. All this that I have said is just and true; but, for my own part, I do not blame you. You are two centuries behind the times with your false ideas of greatness. There, leave us to arrange your affairs, and say that Montriveau made your servants drunk to gratify his vanity and to compromise you——"

The duchess rose to her feet with a spring. "In heaven's name, aunt, do not slander him!"

The old princess' eyes flashed.

"My dear child," she said, "I should have liked to spare such of your illusions as were not fatal. But there must be an end of all illusions now. You would soften me if I were not so old. Come, now, do not vex him, or us, or any one else. I will undertake to satisfy everybody; but promise me not to permit yourself a single step henceforth until you have con-

sulted me. Tell me all, and perhaps I may bring it all right again."

"Aunt, I promise——"

"To tell me everything?"

"Yes, everything. Everything that can be told."

"But, my sweet heart, it is precisely what cannot be told that I want to know. Let us understand each other thoroughly. Come, let me put my withered old lips on your beautiful forehead. No; let me do as I wish. I forbid you to kiss my bones. Old people have a courtesy of their own. There, take me down to my carriage," she added, when she had kissed her niece.

"Then may I go to him in disguise, dear aunt?"

"Why—yes. The story can always be denied," said the old princess.

This was the one idea which the duchess had clearly grasped in the sermon. When Mme. de Chauvry was seated in the corner of her carriage, Mme. de Langeais bade her a graceful adieu and went up to her room. She was quite happy again.

"My person would have snared his heart; my aunt is right; a man cannot surely refuse a pretty woman when she understands how to offer herself."

That evening, at the Élysée-Bourbon, the Duc de Navarrens, M. de Pamiers, M. de Marsay, M. de Grandlieu, and the Duc de Maufrigneuse triumphantly refuted the scandals that were circulating with regard to the Duchess de Langeais. So many officers and other persons had seen Montriveau walking in the Tuileries that morning, that the silly story was set down to chance, which takes all that is offered. And so, in spite of the fact that the duchess' carriage had waited before Montriveau's door, her character became as clear and as spotless as Mambrino's sword after Sancho had polished it up.

But, at two o'clock, M. de Ronquerolles passed Montriveau in a deserted alley, and said with a smile: "She is coming on, is your duchess. Go on, keep it up!" he added, and gave a

significant cut of the riding-whip to his mare, who sped off like a bullet down the avenue.

Two days after the fruitless scandal, Mme. de Langeais wrote to M. de Montriveau. That letter, like the preceding ones, remained unanswered. This time she took her own measures, and bribed M. de Montriveau's man, Auguste. And so at eight o'clock that evening she was introduced into Armand's apartment. It was not the room in which that secret scene had passed ; it was entirely different. The duchess was told that the general would not be at home that night. Had he two houses? The man would give no answer. Mme. de Langeais had bought the key of the room, but not the man's whole loyalty.

When she was left alone she saw her fourteen letters lying on an old-fashioned stand, all of them uncreased and unopened. He had not read them. She sank into an easy-chair, and for a while she lost consciousness. When she came to herself, Auguste was holding toilet vinegar for her to inhale.

"A carriage ; quick !" she ordered.

The carriage came. She hastened downstairs with convulsive speed, returned home, and left orders that no one was to be admitted. For twenty-four hours she lay in bed, and would have no one near her but her woman, who brought her a cup of orange-flower water from time to time. Suzette heard her mistress moan once or twice, and caught a glimpse of tears in the brilliant eyes, now circled with dark shadows.

The next day, amid despairing tears, Mme. de Langeais took her resolution. Her man of business came for an interview, and no doubt received instructions of some kind. Afterward she sent for the Vidame de Pamiers ; and while she waited, she wrote a letter to M. de Montriveau. The vidame punctually came toward two o'clock that afternoon, to find his young cousin looking white and worn, but resigned ; never had her divine loveliness been more poetic than now in the languor of her agony.

"You owe this assignation to your eighty-four years, dear cousin," she said. "Ah! do not smile, I beg of you, when an unhappy woman has reached the lowest depths of wretchedness. You are a gentleman, and after the adventures of your youth you must feel some indulgence for women."

"None whatever," said he.

"Indeed!"

"Everything is in their favor."

"Ah! Well, you are one of the inner family circle; possibly you will be the last relative, the last friend, whose hand I shall press, so I can ask your good offices. Will you, dear vidame, do me a service which I could not ask of my own father, nor of my Uncle Grandlieu, nor of any woman? You cannot fail to understand. I beg of you to do my bidding, and then to forget what you have done, whatever may come of it. It is this: Will you take this letter and go to Monsieur de Montriveau? will you see him yourself, give it into his hands, and ask him, as you men can ask things between yourselves—for you have a code of honor between man and man which you do not use with us, and a different way of regarding things between yourselves—ask him if he will read this letter? Not in your presence. Certain feelings men hide from each other. I give you authority to say, if you think it necessary to bring him, that it is a question of life or death for me. If he deigns——"

"*Deigns!*" repeated the vidame,

"If he deigns to read it," the duchess continued with dignity, "say one thing more. You will go to see him about five o'clock, for I know that he will dine at home to-day at that time. Very good. By way of answer he must come to see me. If, three hours afterward, by eight o'clock, he does not leave his house, all will be over. The Duchesse de Langeais will have vanished from the world. I shall not be dead, dear friend, no, but no human power will ever find me again on this earth. Come and dine with me; I shall at least have

one friend with me in the last agony. Yes, dear cousin, to-night will decide my fate; and whatever happens to me, I pass through an ordeal by fire. There! not a word. I will hear nothing of the nature of comment or advice—— Let us chat and laugh together," she added, holding out a hand, which he kissed. "We will be like two gray-headed philosophers who have learned to enjoy life to the last moment. I will look my best; I will be very enchanting for you. You perhaps will be the last man to set eyes on the Duchesse de Langeais."

The vicomte bowed, took the letter, and went without a word. At five o'clock he returned. His cousin had studied to please him, and she looked lovely indeed. The room was gay with flowers as if for a festivity; the dinner was exquisite. For the gray-headed vidame the duchess displayed all the brilliancy of her wit; she was more charming than she had ever been before. At first the vidame tried to look on all these preparations as a young woman's jest; but now and again the attempted illusion faded, the spell of his fair cousin's charm was broken. He detected a shudder caused by some kind of sudden dread, and once she seemed to listen during a pause.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Hush!" she said.

At seven o'clock the duchess left him for a few minutes. When she came back again she was dressed as her maid might have dressed for a journey. She asked her guest to be her escort, took his arm, sprang into a hackney-coach, and by a quarter to eight they stood outside M. de Montriveau's door.

Armand meantime had been reading the following letter:

"MY FRIEND:—I went to your rooms for a few minutes without your knowledge; I found my letters there, and took them away. This cannot be indifference, Armand, between us; and hatred would show itself quite differently. If you

love me, make an end of this cruel play, or you will kill me, and afterward, learning how much you were loved, you might be in despair. If I have not rightly understood you, if you have no feeling toward me but aversion, which implies both contempt and disgust, then I give up all hope. A man never recovers from those feelings. You will have no regrets. Dreadful though that thought may be, it will comfort me in my long sorrow. Regrets? Oh! my Armand, may I never know of them; if I thought I had caused you but a single regret—— But, no, I will not tell you what desolation I should feel. I should be living still, and I could not be your wife; it would be too late!

“Now that I have given myself wholly to you in thought, to whom else should I give myself?—to God. The eyes that you loved for a little while shall never look on another man’s face; and may the glory of God blind them to all beside. I shall never hear human voices more since I heard yours—so gentle at the first, so terrible yesterday; for it seems to me that I am still only on the morrow of your vengeance. And now may the will of God consume me. Between His wrath and yours, my friend, there will be nothing left for me but a little space for tears and prayers.

“Perhaps you wonder why I write you? Ah! do not think ill of me if I keep a gleam of hope, and give one last sigh to happy life before I take leave of it forever. I am in a hideous position. I feel all the inward serenity that comes when a great resolution has been taken, even while I hear the last growlings of the storm. When you went out on that terrible adventure which so drew me to you, Armand, you went from the desert to the oasis with a good guide to show you the way. Well, I am going out of the oasis into the desert, and you are a pitiless guide to me. And yet you only, my friend, can understand how melancholy it is to look back for the last time on happiness—to you, and you only, I can make moan without a blush. If you grant my entreaty, I shall be happy;

if you are inexorable, I shall expiate the wrong that I have done. After all, it is natural, is it not, that a woman should wish to live, invested with all noble feelings, in her friend's memory? Oh! my love and only love, let her to whom you gave life go down into the tomb in the belief that she is great in your eyes. Your harshness led me to reflect; and now that I love you so, it seems to me that I am less guilty than you think. Listen to my justification, I owe it to you; and you, that are all the world to me, owe me at least a moment's justice.

"I have learned by my own anguish all that I made you suffer by my coquetry; but in those days I was utterly ignorant of love. *You*, knowing what the torture is, *you* mete it out to me! During those first eight months that you gave me you never roused any feeling of love in me. Do you ask why this was so, my friend? I can no more explain it than I can tell you why I love you now. Oh! certainly it flattered my vanity that I should be the subject of your passionate talk, and receive those burning glances of yours; but you left me cold. No, I was not a woman; I had no conception of womanly devotion and happiness. Who was to blame? You would have despised me, would you not, if I had given myself without the impulse of passion? Perhaps it is the highest height to which we can rise—to give all and receive no joy; perhaps there is no merit in yielding one's self to bliss that is foreseen and ardently desired. Alas, my friend, I can say this now; these thoughts came to me when I played with you; and you seemed to me so great even then that I would not have you owe the gift to pity—— What is this that I have written?

"I have taken back all my letters; I am flinging them one by one on the fire; they are burning. You will never know what they confessed—all the love and the passion and the madness——

"I will say no more, Armand; I will stop. I will not say another word of my feelings. If my prayers have not echoed

from my soul through yours, I also, woman that I am, decline to owe your love to your pity. It is my wish to be loved, because you cannot choose but love me, or else to be left without mercy. If you refuse to read this letter, it shall be burnt. If, after you have read it, you do not come to me within three hours, to be henceforth for ever my husband, the one man in the world for me ; then I shall never blush to know that this letter is in your hands, the pride of my despair will protect my memory from all insult, and my end shall be worthy of my love. When you see me no more on earth, albeit I shall still be alive, you yourself will not think without a shudder of the woman who, in three hours' time, will live only to overwhelm you with her tenderness ; a woman consumed by a hopeless love, and faithful—not to memories of past joys—but to a love that was slighted.

“The Duchesse de la Vallière wept for lost happiness and vanished power ; but the Duchesse de Langeais will be happy that she may weep and be a power for you still. Yes, you will regret me. I see clearly that I was not of this world, and I thank you for making it clear to me.

“Farewell ; you will never touch *my* axe. Yours was the executioner's axe, mine is God's ; yours kills, mine saves. Your love was but mortal, it could not endure disdain or ridicule ; mine can endure all things without growing weaker, it will last eternally. Ah ! I feel a sombre joy in crushing you that believe yourself so great ; in humbling you with the calm, indulgent smile of one of the least among the angels that lie at the feet of God, for to them is given the right and the power to protect and watch over men in His name. You have but felt fleeting desires, while the poor nun will shed the light of her ceaseless and ardent prayer about you, she will shelter you all your life long beneath the wings of a love that has nothing of earth in it.

“I have a presentiment of your answer ; our trysting-place will be—in heaven. Strength and weakness can both enter

there, dear Armand; the strong and the weak are bound to suffer. This thought soothes the anguish of my final ordeal. So calm am I that I should fear that I had ceased to love you if I were not about to leave the world for your sake.

“ANTOINETTE.”

“Dear vidame,” said the duchess as they reached Montriveau’s house, “do me the kindness to ask at the door whether he is at home.”

The vidame, obedient after the manner of the eighteenth century to a woman’s wish, got out, and came back to bring his cousin an affirmative answer that sent a shudder through her. She grasped his hand tightly in hers, suffered him to kiss her on either cheek, and begged him to go at once. He must not watch her movements nor try to protect her.

“But the people passing in the street,” he objected.

“No one can fail in respect to me,” she said. It was the last word spoken by the duchess and the woman of fashion.

The vidame went. Mme. de Langeais wrapped herself about in her cloak, and stood on the doorstep until the clocks struck eight. The last stroke died away. The unhappy woman waited ten, fifteen minutes; to the last she tried to see a fresh humiliation in the delay, then her faith ebbed. She turned to leave the fatal threshold.

“Oh, God!” the cry broke from her in spite of herself; it was the first word spoken by the Carmelite.

Montriveau and some of his friends were talking together. He tried to hasten them to a conclusion, but his clock was slow, and by the time he started out for the Hôtel de Langeais the duchess was hurrying on foot through the streets of Paris, goaded by the dull rage in her heart. She reached the Boulevard d’Enfer, and looked out for the last time through falling tears on the noisy, smoky city that lay below in a red mist,

lighted up by its own lamps. Then she hailed a coach, and drove away, never to return.

When the Marquis de Montriveau reached the Hôtel de Langeais, and found no trace of his mistress, he thought that he had been duped. He hurried away at once to the vidame, and found that worthy gentleman in the act of slipping on his flowered dressing-gown, thinking the while of his fair cousin's happiness. Montriveau gave him one of the terrific glances that produced the effect of an electric shock on men and women alike.

"Is it possible that you have lent yourself to some cruel hoax, monsieur?" Montriveau exclaimed. "I have just come from Madame de Langeais' house; the servants say that she is out."

"Then a great misfortune has happened, no doubt," returned the vidame, "and through your fault. I left the duchess at your door——"

"When?"

"At a quarter to eight."

"Good-evening," returned Montriveau, and he hurried home to ask the porter whether he had seen a lady standing on the door-step that evening.

"Yes, my lord marquis, a handsome woman, who seemed very much put out. She was crying like a Magdalen, but she never made a sound, and stood as upright as a post. Then at last she went, and my wife and I that were watching her, while she could not see us, heard her say, 'Oh, God!' so that it went to our hearts, asking your pardon, to hear her say it."

Montriveau, in spite of all his firmness, turned pale at those few words. He wrote a few lines to Ronquerolles, sent off the message at once, and went up to his rooms. Ronquerolles came just about midnight.

Armand gave him the duchess' letter to read.

"Well?" asked Ronquerolles.

"She was here at my door at eight o'clock ; at a quarter-past eight she had gone. I have lost her, and I love her. Oh ! if my life were altogether my own, I could blow my brains out."

"Pooh, pooh ! Keep cool," said Ronquerolles. "Duchesses do not fly off like wagtails. She cannot travel faster than three leagues an hour, and to-morrow we will ride six. Confound it ! Madame de Langeais is no ordinary woman," he continued. "To-morrow we will all of us mount and ride. The police will put us on her track during the day. She must have a carriage ; angels of that sort have no wings. We shall find her whether she is on the road or hidden in Paris. There is the semaphore. We can stop her. You shall be happy. But, my dear fellow, you have made a blunder, of which men of your energy are very often guilty. They judge others by themselves, and do not know the point when human nature gives way if you strain the cords too tightly. Why did you not say a word to me sooner ? I would have told you to be punctual. Adieu till to-morrow," he added, as Montriveau said nothing. "Sleep if you can," he added, with a grasp of the hand.

But the greatest resources which society has ever placed at the disposal of statesmen, kings, ministers, bankers, or any human power, in fact, were all exhausted in vain. Neither Montriveau nor his friends could find any trace of the duchess. It was clear that she had entered a convent. Montriveau determined to search, or to institute a search, for her through every convent in the world. He must have her, even at the cost of all the lives in a town. And in justice to this extraordinary man, it must be said that his frenzied passion awoke to the same ardor daily and lasted through five years. Only in 1829 did the Duc de Navarreins hear by chance that his daughter had traveled to Spain as Lady Julia Hopwood's maid, that she had left her service at Cadiz, and that Lady Julia never discovered that Mlle. Caroline was the illustrious duchess

whose sudden disappearance wagged the tongues of the highest society of Paris.

The feelings of the two lovers when they met again on either side of the grating in the Carmelite convent should now be comprehended to the full, and the violence of the passion awakened in either soul will doubtless explain the catastrophe of the story.

In 1823 the Duc de Langeais was dead, and his wife was free. Antoinette de Navarreins was living, consumed by love, on a ledge of rock in the Mediterranean; but it was in the pope's power to dissolve Sister Theresa's vows. The happiness bought by so much love might yet bloom for the two lovers. These thoughts sent Montriveau flying from Cadiz to Marseilles, and from Marseilles to Paris.

A few months after his return to France, a merchant brig, fitted out and munitiõned for active service, set sail from the port of Marseilles for Spain. The vessel had been chartered by several distinguished men, most of them Frenchmen, who, smitten with a romantic passion for the East, wished to make a journey to those lands. Montriveau's familiar knowledge of Eastern customs made him an invaluable traveling companion, and at the entreaty of the rest he had joined the expedition; the Minister of War appointed him lieutenant-general, and put him on the Artillery Commission to facilitate his departure.

Twenty-four hours later the brig lay to off the northwest shore of an island within sight of the Spanish coast. She had been specially chosen for her shallow keel and light mastage, so that she might lie at anchor in safety half a league away from the reefs that secure the island from approach in this direction. If fishing vessels or the people on the island caught sight of the brig, they were scarcely likely to feel suspicious of her at once; and beside, it was easy to give a reason for her presence without delay. Montriveau hoisted the flag of the

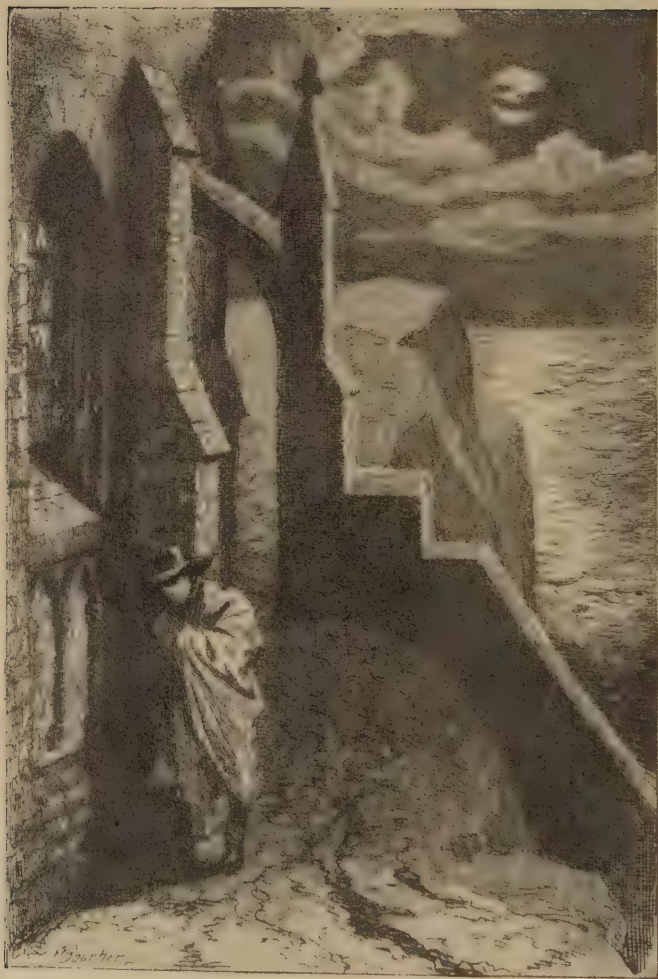
United States before they came in sight of the island, and the crew of the vessel were all American sailors, who spoke nothing but English. One of M. de Montriveau's companions took the men ashore in the ship's long boat, and made them so drunk at an inn in the little town that they could not talk. Then he gave out that the brig was manned by treasure-seekers, a gang of men whose hobby was well known in the United States; indeed, some Spanish writer had written a history of them. The presence of the brig among the reefs was now sufficiently explained. The owners of the vessel, according to the self-styled boatswain's mate, were looking for the wreck of a galleon which foundered thereabout in 1778 with a cargo of treasure from Mexico. The people at the inn and the authorities asked no more questions.

Armand and the devoted friends who were helping him in his difficult enterprise were all from the first of the opinion that there was no hope of rescuing or carrying off Sister Theresa by force or stratagem from the side of the little town. Wherefore these bold spirits, with one accord, determined to take the bull by the horns. They would make a way to the convent at the most seemingly inaccessible point; like General Lamarque, at the storming of Capri, they would conquer Nature. The cliff at the end of the island, a sheer block of granite, afforded even less hold than the rock of Capri. So it seemed at least to Montriveau, who had taken part in that incredible exploit, while the nuns in his eyes were much more redoubtable than Sir Hudson Lowe. To raise a hubbub over carrying off the duchess would cover them with confusion. They might as well set siege to the town and convent, like pirates, and leave not a single soul to tell of their victory. So for them their expedition wore but two aspects. There should be a conflagration and a feat of arms that should dismay all Europe, while the motives of the crime remained unknown; or, on the other hand, a mysterious, aerial descent which should persuade the nuns that the devil himself had

paid them a visit. They had decided upon the latter course in the secret council held before they left Paris, and subsequently everything had been done to insure the success of an expedition which promised some real excitement to jaded spirits weary of Paris and its pleasures.

An extremely light pirogue, made at Marseilles on a Malayan model, enabled them to cross the reef, until the rocks rose from out the water. Then two cables of iron-wire were fastened several feet apart between one rock and another. These wire-ropes slanted upward and downward in opposite directions, so that baskets of iron-wire could travel to and fro along them; and in this manner the rocks were covered with a system of baskets and wire-cables, not unlike the filaments which a certain species of spider weaves about a tree. The Chinese, an essentially imitative people, were the first to take a lesson from the work of instinct. Fragile as these bridges were, they were always ready for use; high waves and the caprices of the sea could not throw them out of working order; the ropes hung just sufficiently slack, so as to present to the breakers that particular curve discovered by Cachin, the immortal creator of the harbor at Cherbourg. Against this cunningly devised line the angry surge is powerless; the law of that curve was a secret wrested from Nature by that faculty of observation in which nearly all human genius consists.

M. de Montriveau's companions were alone on board the vessel, and out of sight of every human eye. No one from the deck of a passing vessel could have discovered either the brig hidden among the reefs, or the men at work among the rocks; they lay below the ordinary range of the most powerful telescope. Eleven days were spent in preparation before the Thirteen, with all their infernal power, could reach the foot of the cliffs. The body of the rock rose up straight from the sea to a height of one hundred and eighty feet. Any attempt to climb the sheer wall of granite seemed impossible; a mouse



HE STOOD UNDER THE WALL TO HEAR THE MUSIC
OF THE ORGAN.

might as well try to creep up the slippery sides of a plain china vase. Still there was a cleft, a straight line of fissure so fortunately placed that large blocks of wood could be wedged firmly into it at a distance of about a foot apart. Into these blocks the daring workers drove iron clamps, specially made for the purpose, with a broad iron bracket at the outer end, through which a hole had been drilled. Each bracket carried a light pine board which corresponded with a notch made in a pole that reached to the top of the cliffs, and was firmly planted in the beach at their feet. With ingenuity worthy of these men who found nothing impossible, one of their number, a skilled mathematician, had calculated the angle from which the steps must start; so that from the middle they rose gradually, like the sticks of a fan, to the top of the cliff, and descended in the same fashion to its base. That miraculously light, yet perfectly firm, staircase cost them twenty-two days of toil. A little tinder and the surf of the sea would destroy all trace of it for ever in a single night. A betrayal of the secret was impossible; and all search for the violators of the convent would be doomed to failure.

At the top of the rock there was a platform with sheer precipice on all sides. The Thirteen, reconnoitring the ground with their glasses from the masthead, made certain that, though the ascent was steep and rough, there would be no difficulty in gaining the convent garden, where the trees were thick enough for a hiding-place. After such great efforts they would not risk the success of their enterprise, and were compelled to wait till the moon passed out of her last quarter.

For two nights Montriveau, wrapped in his cloak, lay out on the rock platform. The singing at vespers and matins filled him with unutterable joy. He stood under the wall to hear the music of the organ, listening intently for one voice among the rest. But in spite of the silence, the confused effect of music was all that reached his ears. In those sweet harmonies defects of execution are lost; the pure spirit of art

comes into direct communication with the spirit of the hearer, making no demand on the attention, no strain on the power of listening. Intolerable memories awoke. All the love within him seemed to break into blossom again at the breath of that music; he tried to find auguries of happiness in the air. During the last night he sat with his eyes fixed upon an ungrated window, for bars were not needed on the side of the precipice. A light shone there all through the hours; and that instinct of the heart, which is sometimes true, and as often false, cried within him: "She is there!"

"She is certainly there! To-morrow she will be mine," he said to himself, and joy blended with the slow tinkling of a bell that began to ring.

Strange unaccountable workings of the heart! The nun, wasted by yearning love, worn out with tears and fasting, prayer and vigils; the woman of nine-and-twenty, who had passed through heavy trials, was loved more passionately than the light-hearted girl, the woman of four-and-twenty, the sylphide, had ever been. But is there not, for men of vigorous character, something attractive in the sublime expression engraven on women's faces by the impetuous stirrings of thought and misfortunes of no ignoble kind? Is there not a beauty of suffering which is the most interesting of all beauty to those men who feel that within them there is an inexhaustible wealth of tenderness and consoling pity for a creature so gracious in weakness, so strong in love? It is the ordinary nature that is attracted by young, smooth, pink-and-white beauty, or, in one word, by prettiness. In some faces love awakens amid the wrinkles carved by sorrow and the ruin made by melancholy; Montriveau could not but feel drawn to these. For cannot a lover, with the voice of a great longing, call forth a wholly new creature? a creature athrob with the life but just begun breaks forth for him alone, from the outward form that is fair for him, and faded for all the world beside. Does he not love two women? One of them, as others see her, is pale and wan

and sad ; but the other, the unseen love that his heart knows, is an angel who understands life through feeling, and is adorned in all her glory only for love's high festivals.

The general left his post before sunrise, but not before he had heard voices singing together, sweet voices full of tenderness sounding faintly from the cell. When he came down to the foot of the cliffs where his friends were waiting, he told them that never in his life had he felt such inthralling bliss, and in the few words there was that unmistakable thrill of repressed strong feeling, that magnificent utterance which all men respect.

That night eleven of his devoted comrades made the ascent in the darkness. Each man carried a poinard, a provision of chocolate, and a set of house-breaking tools. They climbed the outer walls with scaling-ladders, and crossed the cemetery of the convent. Montriveau recognized the long, vaulted gallery through which he went to the parlor, and remembered the windows of the room. His plans were made and adopted in a moment. They would effect an entrance through one of the windows in the Carmelite's half of the parlor, find their way along the corridors, ascertain whether the sisters' names were written on the doors, find Sister Theresa's cell, surprise her as she slept, and carry her off, bound and gagged. The programme presented no difficulties to men who combined boldness and a convict's dexterity with the knowledge peculiar to men of the world, especially as they would not scruple to give a stab to insure silence.

In two hours the bars were sawn through. Three men stood on guard outside, and two inside the parlor. The rest, barefooted, took up their posts along the corridor. Young Henri de Marsay, the most dexterous man among them, disguised by way of precaution in a Carmelite's robe, exactly like the costume of the convent, led the way, and Montriveau came immediately behind him. The clock struck three just as the two

men reached the dormitory cells. They soon saw the position. Everything was perfectly quiet. With the help of a dark lantern they read the names luckily written on every door, together with the picture of a saint or saints and the mystical words which every nun takes as a kind of motto for the beginning of her new life and the revelation of her last thought. Montriveau reached Sister Theresa's door and read the inscription: *Sub invocatione sanctæ matris Theresæ*, and her motto: *Adoremus in æternum*. Suddenly his companion laid a hand on his shoulder. A bright light was streaming through the chinks of the door. M. de Ronquerolles came up at that moment.

"All the nuns are in the church," he said; "they are beginning the Office for the Dead."

"I will stay here," said Montriveau. "Go back into the parlor, and shut the door at the end of the passage."

He threw open the door and rushed in, preceded by his disguised companion, who let down the veil over his face.

There before them lay the duchess—dead; her plank bed had been laid on the floor of the outer room of her cell, between two lighted candles. Neither Montriveau nor de Marsay spoke a word or uttered a cry; but they looked into each other's faces. The general's dumb gesture seemed to say: "Let us carry her away!"

"Quick!" shouted Ronquerolles, "the procession of nuns is leaving the church. You will be caught!"

With magical swiftness of movement, prompted by an intense desire, the dead woman was carried into the convent parlor, passed through the window, and lowered from the walls before the abbess, followed by the nuns, returned to take up Sister Theresa's body. The sister left in charge had imprudently left her post; there were secrets that she longed to know; and so busy was she ransacking the inner room that she heard nothing, and was horrified when she came back to find that the body was gone. Before the women, in their

blank amazement, could think of making a search, the duchess had been lowered by a cord to the foot of the crags, and Montriveau's companions had destroyed all traces of their work. By nine o'clock that morning there was not a sign to show that either staircase or wire-cables had ever existed, and Sister Theresa's body had been taken on board. The brig came into the port to ship her crew, and sailed that day.

Montriveau, down in the cabin, was left alone with Antoinette de Navarreins. For some hours it seemed as if her dead face was transfigured for him by that unearthly beauty which the calm of death gives to the body before it perishes.

"Look here!" said Ronquerolles when Montriveau reappeared on deck, "*that* was a woman once, now it is nothing. Let us tie a cannon-ball to both feet and throw the body overboard; and if you ever think of her again, think of her as of some book that you read as a boy."

"Yes," assented Montriveau, "it is nothing now but a dream."

"That is sensible of you. Now, after this, have passions; but as for love, a man ought to know how to place it wisely. It is only the last love of a woman that can satisfy the first love of a man."

PRÉ-LÉVÊQUE, GENEVA, *January 26, 1834.*



MAÎTRE CORNÉLIUS.

TRANSLATED BY JNO. RUDD, B. A.

To Monsieur Le Compte George Mnischeh.

Some envious beings may imagine on seeing this page adorned by one of the most illustrious of Samartian names that I am trying, as the goldsmiths do, to enhance a modern work with an ancient jewel—one of the fashions of the day. But you, my dear count, and a few others will know that I am only aiming at paying the debt I owe to Talent, Memory, and Friendship.

IN 1479, on All-Saints' Day, the time at which this history commences, vespers were just ending in the cathedral of Tours. The Archbishop Hélie de Bourdeilles arose from his throne to himself give the benediction to the faithful. The sermon had been long, and darkness had fallen before its conclusion ; and in some portions of the great church, the towers of which were not finished at that time, the densest obscurity prevailed.

However, a goodly number of tapers were burning in honor of the saints, on the triangular frames destined to receive these so pious offerings, the merit and significance of which have never been properly explained. The lights on each altar and the candles of the candelabra in the chancel were all flaming. Most irregularly shed among the forest of columns and arches which support the roof of the main aisles of the cathedral, the gleam of those masses of candles scarcely illumined the vast

building ; for, by the strong shadows cast by the pillars and projected upward among the galleries, they caused a myriad fantastic effects and increased the gloom that enveloped the arches, the vaulted ceilings, and the lateral chapels—which, even at mid-day, were always gloomy.

The immense congregation presented no less picturesque effects. Some figures were so vaguely seen in the uncertain light that they seemed like phantoms ; while others, lit up by some chance side-light, drew the attention like the principal heads in a picture. Some statues were animate, some of the men were stone. Here and there eyes might be seen sparkling among the columns ; the marble saw, the stone spake, the vaulted groins reëchoed sighs, the whole edifice was instinct with life.

The existence of nations can present no more solemn scenes, no moment more majestic. Mankind in the mass needs motion to make it poetical ; but in these resorts of religious thought, when mundane wealth unites itself with celestial splendor, an incredible sublimity is experienced in the silence ; there is awe in the bent knees, hope in the upraised hands. The concert of feeling which is ascending heavenward from each soul produces an inexplicable phenomenon of spiritual effect.

The mystical exaltation of the true worshipers reacts upon each individual ; the feeble are doubtless upborne upon this flood-tide of faith and love. Prayer, an electric force, draws our nature higher than itself. This involuntary unison of all wills, each equally humbled to earth, equally risen to heaven, contains, doubtless, the secret of the magic influence wielded by the intonations of the priests, the music of the organs, the perfumes and pomps of the altar, the voices of the crowd, its silent meditations.

Therefore we need not be astonished to see in the Middle Ages that so many affairs of the heart began in churches after long ecstatic hours—passions not always ending in sanctity, and for which, as is usually the case, woman did the penance.

In those days religious sentiment certainly was in close affinity to love; either it was the motive or the end of it. Love was but a second religion; it had its fine frenzies, its innocent superstitions, its sublime emotions, all in sympathy with Christianity.

The manners of that period will also serve to explain the alliance existing between religion and love. First, then, social life had no place of meeting but before the altar. Lords, vassals, men, women were never equals elsewhere. In the church alone could lovers meet and exchange their vows. The festivals of the church formed our predecessors' theatres; woman's soul was more deeply stirred than to-day it is at an opera or a ball; and does not every strong emotion invariably bring woman around to love?

So, by dint of mingling with life and seizing it in all its acts and interests, religion had become the sharer of every virtue, the accomplice of every vice. Religion had become a science; it was mixed up with politics, eloquence, crime; it entered the skin of the sick man and the poor; it sat on thrones—it was all-pervading. These semi-learned observations may, perhaps, serve to vindicate the veracity of this Study, though certain details may scandalize the more perfect morals of our age, which are, as is known of all, a trifle too strait-laced.

At that moment when the priests stopped their chanting, and the notes of the organ mingled with the vibrant voices of the loud "Amen" as it issued from the deep chests of the choir-men, and sent a murmuring echo through the farther arches, the while the devout assembly awaited the archbishop's benediction, a burgher, impatient to get home or trembling for the safety of his purse in the crowd when the congregation should disperse, quietly slipped out, taking the risk of being called a bad Catholic. On this, a gentleman, who was leaning on one of the enormous columns that surround the choir, where he was enshrouded in the shadows, hastened to

take the place so recently vacated by the worthy Tourangeau. Which done, he quickly hid his face behind the tall plumes of his tall, gray cap, and knelt down before his chair with so deep an air of contrition that it might even have deceived an inquisitor.

His immediate neighbors, after observing him closely, seemed to recognize him; after which as with one accord they returned to their devotions with a significant shrug expressive of all their thoughts—a caustic, jeering, mocking scandal. Two old women nodded their heads expressively, exchanging glances which seemed to penetrate the future.

The chair into which this young man had glided was near by a chapel built in between two columns, inclosed by an iron railing. It was a custom for the dean and chapter of the cathedral to rent at a high figure to seignorial families, and even to rich burgesses, the right to be present at the services, themselves and their household exclusively, in the various lateral chapels situated along the side-aisles of the cathedral. This simony is practiced even now. Then a woman had her chapel as she now has her box at the opera. The tenants of these privileged places were expected to decorate and keep up the altars therein; and each made it a pride to adorn theirs most sumptuously—a vanity which, needless to say, was not rebuked by the church.

In this particular chapel a lady was kneeling close to the railing on a handsome rug of red velvet trimmed with gold tassels, and close to the spot but now vacated by the worthy citizen. A silver-gilt lamp hung from the vaulted ceiling of the chapel before the magnificently decorated altar and cast its mild light on the Book of Hours* held by the lady. The book trembled violently in her hand as the young man approached her.

“Amen!”

To that response, chanted with a low, sweet, agitated voice,

* Prayer Book.

happily submerged in the now general clamor, she rapidly added in a whisper :

“ You will ruin me ! ”

The words were spoken with an innocence to which any man of delicacy would at once have submitted ; they reached and pierced the heart. But the stranger, carried away perhaps by one of those paroxysms of passion which stifle conscience, remained in his chair, and slightly raised his head that he might peer into the chapel.

“ He sleeps ! ” he replied in a voice so low that the words could only be heard by the young woman as sound is heard in its own echo.

The lady turned pale ; her furtive glance left for an instant the vellum page of the missal and turned on the old man whom the youthful one had designated. What terrible complicity was in that look ? When the young woman had cautiously examined the old man, she drew a deep breath and raised her brow, adorned with a precious jewel, to a picture of the Virgin ; this simple movement, her attitude, the glistering eye, disclosed her life with ingenuous candor ; had she been wicked she would have exercised more dissimulation.

The person who thus inspired these two with terror was a little old hunchback, nearly bald, with a savage expression, and who wore a long, dingy-colored gray beard cut into the shape of a broad fan. On his breast glittered the cross of St. Michael. His coarse, thick hands were covered with rough gray hairs and had been clasped together, but they had now dropped slightly asunder in the slumber to which he had so imprudently yielded himself. The right hand seemed ready to grasp the dagger, the handle guard of which was of iron in shape like a shell. In the manner in which he had disposed this weapon the hilt was immediately under his hand ; if by ill-luck he should touch it he would, beyond doubt, awaken instantly and look at his wife.

His sardonic mouth, the peaked chin, aggressively pushed

forward, showed all the characteristics of malignancy, of a coldly cruel sagacity, which would surely enable him to divine all because he suspected all. His yellow forehead was puckered like to those of men who believe nothing, weigh everything, who test the exact meaning of every human act and the meaning thereof. His bodily frame, though deformed, was bony and sinewy ; it looked to be both vigorous and irritable ; he was, in short, an ogre who had been spoiled in the making.

When this terrible being should awake the young lady was evidently in much danger. That jealous husband would certainly not fail to at once detect the difference between the worthy old burgher, who gave him no umbrage, and the new-comer, a young courtier, slender and elegant.

"Libera nos a malo" [deliver us from evil], said she, trying to impart her fears to the young cavalier.

The latter raised his eyes and looked at her. Tears were in his eyes ; the tears of love and despair. When the young lady saw them she trembled and thus betrayed herself. Perhaps both had long resisted and were no longer able to further hold out against a love which increased with each recurring day through invincible obstacles, brooded over by fear, strengthened by youth.

The lady was fairly handsome ; but her pallor told of sufferings endured in secret, which made her interesting. Moreover, she had an elegant figure and her hair was the most lovely in the world. Watched over by a tiger, her life was the forfeit if discovered whispering a word, accepting a glance, or in permitting a mere pressure of the hand.

It is possible that love may have been more deeply felt than by those hearts, if never more rapturously confessed, never more enjoyed, but certes it is that never was passion so perilously circumstanced. It is easy to understand that to these two beings the air, the sounds about them, the foot-falls and so forth, things of utter indifference to other people, presented hidden qualities, perceptible peculiarities which only they could

distinguish. It may be that their love caused them to become faithful interpreters of the touch of the icy hands of the old priest to whom they made their auricular confessions of their sins, and from whose hands they received the Host as they knelt at the holy altar of God. It was a deep love, love gashed into the soul like as a scar is hewn upon the body and which remains during the whole of our life! As these two young people regarded each other, the woman seemed to say to her lover: "Let us perish, but as one." And the young knight made answer: "We are one, but we will not die!"

For her response she made him a sign, indicating the presence of her elderly duenna and two pages.

The duenna slept; the pages were but youthful ones and seemingly careless of what might happen, of good or evil, to their master.

"Do not be alarmed as you leave the church; go and be managed as you may be led."

The young noble had but murmured these words, when the hand of the old seigneur slipped down upon the handle of his dagger. Feeling the cold touch of the iron he instantly awoke, and his tawny eyes at once fixed themselves upon his wife. By a peculiarity, seldom granted even to men of genius, he awoke with an alert brain and as vivid ideas as though he had never slept.

He was jealous.

The lover, one eye on his mistress, the other on her husband, whom he closely watched, now rose and vanished behind a column at the first movement he had detected in the old man's hands; then he effaced himself swiftly as a bird. The lady's eyes were engaged on her book and she appeared to be quite calm. But try how she might, she could not prevent the flushing of her face nor the unwonted violence of the beating of her heart. The old lord saw the unusual crimson of her cheeks, forehead, and even of her eyelids. He could also hear the vehement throbs of her heart, which were distinctly

audible in the chapel. He looked inquisitively around, but not seeing any one whom he could distrust, said to his wife :

“What troubles you, my dear ?”

“The scent of the incense sickens me,” she replied.

“Is it particularly unpleasant to-day ?” he asked.

Despite this sarcastic query, the wily old man pretended to accept this excuse ; but still he suspected some treachery and resolved to watch his treasure more carefully even than he had hitherto done.

The benediction was pronounced. Without waiting for the *Sacula sæculorum*, the crowd rushed like a heaving torrent to the doors of the church. Following his usual custom, the old lord waited until the general hurry was over ; then issued forth, the duenna in front with the youngest page, who carried a lantern on a pole ; himself, his wife on arm, being followed by the other page.

As he made his way to the side-door opening on the west nave of the cloister, by which he generally went out, a stream of people detached itself from the flood which obstructed the great portals and surged through the aisle around the old noble and his people. The mass was impacted too solidly to allow of his retracing his steps ; and the gentleman and his wife were therefore pushed onward to the door by the tremendous pressure of the crowd behind them.

The husband tried to pass out first, dragging the lady by her arm, but just then he was jerked vigorously into the street and his wife snatched from him by a stranger. The sinister hunchback at once saw that he had fallen into a trap, and one that had been cleverly arranged.

It was now he repented himself that he had slept ; but he collected his whole strength, seized his wife once more by the sleeve of her gown and with his other tried to cling fast to the door-post of the church ; but love’s ardor carried the day against jealous rage. The young man clasped his mistress round the waist and tore her away with the strength of

despair; so violent was the disruption that the stuff of silk and gold was rent noisily apart, the brocade and whalebone gave way, and the old man remained standing with naught save the sleeve in his clutch.

A roar like that of a lion rose above the tumult of the multitude, and a terrible voice was heard bawling out the words:

"To me, Poitiers! Help; here to the door! The Comte de Saint-Vallier's retainers, here, help!"

And the Comte Aymar de Poitiers, Sire de Saint-Vallier, attempted to draw his sword and clear a space around him. But he found himself pressed upon and surrounded by forty or fifty gentlemen whom it were most dangerous to wound. Several of these, especially of the highest rank, replied gibingly to him as they dragged him along the cloisters.

With a lightning-like celerity the abductor carried the countess to an open chapel, seating her on a wooden bench behind a confessional box. By the light of the candles burning before the saint to whom the chapel was dedicated they gazed upon each other for a silent moment, clasped hands, and amazed at their audacity. The countess could not summon the cruel courage to blame the young man for the boldness to which they owed this first and only instant of happiness.

"Will you fly with me into the adjacent States?" asked the young man eagerly. "Two English horses are awaiting us near-by which are able to do thirty leagues at a stretch."

"Ah!" she cried softly, "in what corner of the world could you find a hiding-place for a daughter of King Louis the Eleventh?"

"True," answered the young man, silenced by a difficulty he had not anticipated.

"Why, then, did you tear me from my husband?" she asked in a voice of terror.

"Alas!" replied the young lover, "I did not guess at the agitation I should experience in finding myself by your side, in hearing your voice as you spoke to me. I had arranged .

plans, two or three schemes, and now that I see you, I feel as if all were accomplished."

"But I am lost!" said the countess.

"We are saved!" the young man cried in the blind enthusiasm of love. "Listen carefully to me."

"This will cost me my life!" said she, letting the tears that filled her eyes go rolling down her cheeks. "The count will kill me—perhaps this very night! But go you to the King; tell him all the tortures his daughter has endured these five years. He loved me well when I was a child; he used to laugh and call me 'Marie-full-of-grace,' because I was so ugly. Ah! could he only know to what a man he gave me, his anger would be terrible. I have never dared complain out of a sense of pity for the count. Beside, how could my plaint reach the ears of the King? Even my confessor is but a spy of Saint-Vallier. That is why I consented to this criminal meeting, hoping to find a champion—some one who will declare the truth to the King. But—may I dare trust? Oh!" she cried, turning pale and interrupting herself, "here comes the page."

The distraught countess put her hands before her face and tried to veil it.

"Fear nothing," said the young lord, "he is ours! You may safely trust him; he belongs to me. When the count contrives to return to you, he will give us timely warning. In the confessional," he added in a muttered tone, "is a priest, a friend of mine; he will say that he rescued you from the turmoil, and drew you here for safety out of the crowd, and gave you his protection in this chapel. Thus all is arranged to deceive him."

At these words the countess dried her tears, but a saddened expression clouded her face.

"He cannot be deceived," said she. "To-night he will know all. Beware his revenge. Save me from his blows. At once to le Plessis, see the King, tell him——; " here she hesi-

tated ; but some dreadful memory gave her courage to disclose some secrets of her married life, so she continued :

“ Yes, tell him that to obtain the mastery over me the count has me bled in both arms—to exhaust me. Tell him that my husband drags me around by my hair ; tell him that I am a prisoner ; say that——”

Her heart was bursting, sobs choked her throat, tears rained from her eyes. In her agitation she allowed the young man to kiss her hand, the while he muttered broken, inconsecutive words.

“ Poor love ! No one may speak to the King. Although my uncle is chief master of his bowmen, I cannot obtain admission to le Plessis. My darling lady ! my most beautiful queen ! Oh ! but what has she not suffered ? Marie, at least let me say two words to you, or we are assuredly lost.”

“ What will become of us ? ” she murmured. Then, discerning on the dark wall a picture of the Virgin on which the light fell from the lamp, she cried out :

“ Holy Mother of God, give us counsel ! ”

“ To-night,” said the young man, “ I shall be in your room with you.”

“ How ? ” was her naïve question.

“ This evening I go to propose myself as an apprentice to Maître Cornélius, the King’s silversmith. To him I bear a letter of introduction which will compel him to receive me. His house is next to yours. Once under the roof of that old scoundrel I can, by the aid of a silken ladder, soon find my way to your suite of rooms.”

“ Oh ! ” said she, petrified with horror, “ if you love me, do not go to Maître Cornélius.”

“ Ah ! ” cried he, pressing her to his heart with all the energy of youth, “ then, indeed, you do love me ! ”

“ Yes,” said she. “ Are you not my sole hope ? Beside,” she added, regarding him with dignity, “ you are a gentleman, I confide myself to your honor. So unhappy am I that you

will never betray my trust. But to what end is all this? Go, the rather let me die than that you should abide in the house of Maître Cornélius. Do you not know that all his apprentices——”

“Have been hanged?” said the young noble, laughing.

“But do not go; you will become the victim of some sorcery.”

“I cannot pay a too high price for the great honor of serving you,” said he, with a look of such ardor that her eyes drooped under it.

“And my husband?” said she.

“Here is that will cause him to sleep,” answered the young man, drawing a small phial from his belt.

“Not for ever?” queried the countess tremblingly.

For all reply the young seigneur made a gesture of horror.

“I would long ago have defied him to mortal combat if it were not for his great age,” said he. “But God preserve me from ridding his life by a philter.”

“Forgive me,” said the countess blushing. “My sins have cruelly punished me. In a moment of despair I have thought of killing the count—I feared you might have the same desire. So great has my sorrow been that as yet I have never been able to confess the so wicked thought; I believed it would be repeated to him, and then he would be avenged on me. I have shamed you,” she went on, distressed by his silence. “Well, I deserve your blame!”

She flung the phial with great violence to the ground and it was broken.

“Do not come,” said she, “it is that my husband sleeps lightly; my duty demands that I await the help of heaven—that will I do.”

She arose to leave the chapel. “Ah!” cried the young man, “but bid me kill him and I will do it. You will see me this evening, madame.”

“I showed wisdom in destroying that drug,” she murmured

in a voice husky with joy at finding herself so ardently loved. "The dread of arousing my husband will save us from ourselves."

"I pledge you my life," said the young man, pressing her hand.

"Should the King be willing the pope can annul my marriage; then we may be united," she cried, giving him a look full of delicious hopes.

"Monseigneur comes!" exclaimed the page bustling in.

Instantly the young noble, surprised at the short time he had gained with his mistress and greatly wondering at the count's celerity, snatched a kiss which the countess could not refuse.

"To-night," said he, as he hastily slipped out of the chapel.

Thanks to the darkness, the lover made his way to the great portal in safety, gliding from pillar to pillar in the long shadows which they cast across the nave. An old canon suddenly issued from the confessional, came to the side of the countess and gently closed the railing, while the page gravely marched up and down with the manner of a sentry.

A blaze of light heralded the coming of the count. He was accompanied by a number of his friends and by servants bearing torches; himself advanced, drawn sword in hand. His gloomy gaze seemed to pierce the dense cathedral shadows and to rake the remotest depths.

"Monseigneur, madame is there," said the page to him.

The Count de Saint-Vallier found his wife kneeling on the steps before the altar, the canon standing alongside reading his breviary. At the sight the count violently shook the railing as if to give vent to his fury.

"What want you here in church, with a drawn sword?" asked the old priest.

"Father, this is my husband," said the countess.

The priest took a key out of his sleeve and unlocked the

railed gate of the chapel. The count, almost against his will, cast an eye into the confessional, then entered the chapel, and seemed to be listening to the silence of the place.

"Monsieur," said his wife, "you owe your thanks to this venerable canon for giving me a refuge here."

The Count de Saint-Vallier turned pale with anger; he dared not look at his friends, who had come less with the intention of assisting than of laughing at him. Then he curtly answered :

"Thank the Lord, my father, for I will surely find some way to repay you."

He took his wife by the arm, and, without giving her an opportunity to finish the curtsy she was making to the canon, he signed to his retainers and left the church without uttering a word to those who had accompanied him. His silence was ominous.

Impatient to reach his castle and occupied as he was in an effort to get at the truth, he made his way through the tortuous street which at that time separated the cathedral from the chancellerie, a fine building but recently erected by the Chancellor Juvénal des Ursins, on the site of an old fortress given by Charles VII. to that faithful servant as a guerdon for his splendid services. This street, the Rue de la Scellerie, so named in honor of the office of the Great Seal which long stood there, connected old Tours with Châteauneuf, where was the noted abbey of Saint-Martin, of which many Kings had been glad to be elected canons. After long discussions this borough had been incorporated with the city; this had been so now for nearly a hundred years.

At last the count reached the Rue du Mârier in which his dwelling, the Hôtel de Poitiers, was situated. When the escort had passed the gates into the courtyard, and they had been closed after them, a profound silence pervaded the narrow street where a few high seigneurs at that time had residences; for this new suburb of the town was near to le Plessis,

the King's usual place of abode, and where the courtiers when summoned could instantly go. The last house in the street was also the last in the town. It belonged to Maître Cornélius Hoogworst, an old merchant of Brabant, to whom Louis the Eleventh gave his closest confidences in the various financial dealings which his cunning policy required done outside his own kingdom. For the favorable opportunity it gave to his tyranny over his wife, the Comte de Saint-Vallier had taken the mansion next to the house of Maître Cornélius.

An explanation of the houses will show the advantages offered the jealous husband. It was easy to be seen that the same architect had built both of them, and that they were destined as the abodes of tyrants. The count's house had been built near the old boundary of the city, and was inclosed in a garden. On the side next the embankment, lately constructed by Louis XI. between Tours and le Plessis, dogs defended the entrance to the premises ; while on the east they were divided from the nearest houses by a large courtyard ; on the west backed up the house occupied by Maître Cornélius.

Each was of sinister aspect and resembled a small fort, which could be well defended against a turbulent populace. The riots and civil wars of this period amply justified these precautions. The windows looking on the street were strongly barred with iron, and shutters of the same material. A stone block used for mounting horseback stood close to the porch.

As six o'clock was striking from the great tower of the abbey Saint-Martin, the lover of the hapless countess walked past the de Poitiers hôtel and paused there for a moment to listen for any sound made by the servants in the lower hall, who were taking their suppers. Casting a glance at the window of the room he supposed to be his minstress', he went on his way to the next house. Everywhere on his way the young man had heard the roistering of the jolly holiday-makers, in honor of the day. The badly-joined blinds let out beams of light, the chimneys smoked, the pleasant savor of roasting

meats pervaded the town. Religious services being over, the inhabitants were regaling themselves with confused mutterings of satisfaction, more readily imagined than described. But here deep silence reigned, for in those two dwellings lived two passions which can never rejoice.

Beyond them stretched the silent country. While these two dwellings standing beneath the towers of Saint-Martin, standing apart from the others in the street, at the crooked end of it, seemed afflicted with leprosy. The opposite building was the property of some State criminal and was under the ban of the law. No young man but would have been struck by the great contrast. About, as he was, to fling himself into a horribly hazardous enterprise, it is not to be wondered at that the daring young noble stopped short before the door of the silversmith-treasurer, and called to mind the many uncanny tales he had heard of the life of Maître Cornélius—tales which had caused such untoward terror to the countess.

In this time a man of war, a lover even, every man trembled at the word "magic." Few indeed were the minds whose imaginations were incredulous of occult forces and tales of the marvelous. This lover of the Comtesse de Saint-Vallier, one of the daughters of Louis XI. by Madame de Sassenage, and born in Dauphiné, courageous as he was in other respects, was apt to think twice before entering the house of a sorcerer.

The history of Maître Cornélius Hoogworst will fully explain the confidence he had inspired in the count, the terrible fear of the countess, and the hesitation to which the lover now made pause. To enable the nineteenth-century reader to clearly understand how such seeming commonplace events could be turned into something supernatural, and to cause them to share the dread of that olden time, it is necessary to interrupt the course of the narrative and cast a glance at the preceding life and career of Maître Cornélius.

Cornélius Hoogworst, one of the richest merchants of

Ghent, having drawn upon himself the resentment of Charles, Duke of Burgundy, had found a refuge and protection at the Court of Louis XI. The King was well aware of the advantages he could gain from a man connected with all the principal houses of commerce of Flanders, Venice, and the East ; he naturalized and ennobled—by royal letters—and, more, flattered Maître Cornelius ; a most rare thing with that monarch. Louis XI. pleased the Fleming as much as the Fleming pleased the King. Wily, suspicious, avaricious ; equally politic, equally well informed ; both superior to their time ; each understanding the other marvelously ; they discarded and resumed with equal facility, the one his conscience, the other his religion ; they worshiped the same Virgin—one from conviction, the other from policy ; in short, if we may trust the jealous statements of Olivier le Daim and Tristan, the King resorted to the Fleming's house for those diversions with which King Louis XI. amused himself. History has been at the pains to preserve to the knowledge of posterity the licentious tastes of this monarch who was certainly not averse to debauchery. No doubt the Fleming derived both pleasure and profit in lending himself to the caprices and indulgences of his royal client.

Cornélius at this time had lived for nine years in the city of Tours. During these nine years extraordinary events had occurred in his house, which had made him the object of universal execration. On his arrival he had spent immense sums in order to safely guard his treasures. The curious inventions secretly made for him by the locksmiths of the town, the singular precautions he took to bring them to his house in a way to compel their silence, were for a long time the subject of countless tales, which furnished the evening gossip of the Tourangeaux. These peculiar devices on the part of the old man caused every one to believe him the possessor of Oriental wealth. Consequently the story-tellers of that district—the

NOTE.—The king's silversmith was also his treasurer,

birthplace of French romance—built rooms full of gold and precious stones in the Fleming's house, not omitting to ascribe this fabulous wealth to compacts with unholy genii.

Maître Cornélius had brought with him from Ghent two Flemish servants, an old woman and a young apprentice; the latter, youthful, with a gentle, attractive appearance, served as his secretary, cashier, factotum, and messenger. During the first year of his settlement in Tours a considerable robbery was effected on his premises; judicial inquiry showed that the crime must have been committed by one of its inmates. The old man had his two menservants and apprentice put in prison. The young lad was weakly and he died under the sufferings of the "question,"* still protesting his innocence. The two men confessed the crime to escape torture; but when asked by the judge where the stolen property could be found, they kept silence; so, after renewed tortures, they were tried, condemned, and hung. On their way to the gallows they declared themselves innocent, as is the custom of all men when about to be executed.

For many a day the town of Tours talked over this singular business; but the criminals were Flemish, and the interest in their unhappy fate, and that of the young clerk, soon evaporated. In those days, wars and seditions supplied continual excitement, and each day's new drama eclipsed that of the preceding night.

More affected by the loss of his pelf than by the death of his three servants, Maître Cornélius lived alone in the house with the old Flemish woman, his sister. From the King he obtained the privilege to use the royal couriers for his private affairs; sold his mules to a muleteer in the neighborhood, and lived thenceforward in the deepest solitude, seeing no one but the King, and transacting his business through the medium of Jews, who, shrewd arithmeticians, served him faithfully and well for the sake of his so-powerful interest.

* Torture to induce confession.

Some time after this affair, the King himself placed with his old *torçonneir* a young orphan in whom he took much interest. Louis XI. called Maître Cornélius by that obsolete term, familiarly, which under the reign of Saint-Louis meant a usurer, a collector of taxes, a man who squeezed money out of folk by extortion. The term *tortionnaire*, which is a legal term still extant, explains the old French word *torçonnier*, and which is often spelled *tortionneur*. The poor young boy devoted himself to the interest of his master, the old Fleming, and succeeded in winning his encomiums and getting into his good graces. One winter's night the diamonds placed in Cornélius' keeping by the King of England as security for a hundred thousand crowns were stolen; suspicion naturally fell on the poor orphan. Louis XI. was the more severe with him because he had vouched for the boy's fidelity. So, after a very brief examination by the grand provost, the unfortunate youth was taken out and hanged. After that it was a long time before any one dared to go to learn the art of banking and exchange from Maître Cornélius.

In the course of time, however, it came that two young men of the town, Tourangeaux, men of honor, eager to make their fortunes, took service with the silversmith. Large robberies coincided with the admission of the two youths into the house. The circumstances of these crimes, the manner of the perpetration, plainly enough showed some collusion between the thieves and the inmates of the house; how was it possible that the new-comers should escape accusation? Become by this time more than ever suspicious and vindictive, the old Fleming laid the matter before the King, who placed the case in the hands of his grand provost. A trial was promptly had, and more quickly finished. Each was more promptly executed.

But the inhabitants of Tours, in their patriotism, secretly blamed Tristan l'Hermite for unseemly haste. Guilty or not guilty, the young fellow-townsmen were looked upon as vic-

tims, and Cornélius as an executioner. The two families thus thrown into mourning were of much esteem; their complaints secured much sympathy, and, little by little, they succeeded in making it come to be common belief that all the victims sent to the scaffold by the King's silversmith were innocent. Some went so far as to say that the cruel miser imitated the King and sought to put terror and the gibbet between himself and the world of men; others there were who declared he had never been robbed at all—that these terrible executions were brought about as the result of cold calculation; that all he cared about was to be relieved of all care for his treasure.

The first effect of these rumors was to effectually isolate Maître Cornélius. The good people of Tours treated him as they would have done a leper; called him the "tortionnaire," and named his house *Malemaison*—House of Evil. Even if the Fleming could have found strangers to the town bold enough to enter his service, the inhabitants of the town would have prevented by their warnings. The most favorable impression had of Maître Cornélius was that of those who considered him as being merely baneful and sinister. Some he inspired with instinctive dread; others were impressed with the power that is always paid to great wealth and influence; to some he had the fascination of mystery. His mode of life, his countenance, and the favor of the King seemed to justify all the rumors of which he was the subject.

After the death of his persecutor, the Duke of Burgundy, Cornélius traveled much in foreign lands; during his absence the King caused his house to be patrolled by a company of his Scottish Guard. This royal solicitude it was that made the courtiers believe that Maître Cornélius had bequeathed his property to Louis XI. When he was home it was but rarely that he left his premises; the gentlemen of the Court frequently visited him, and he loaned them money rather liberally, though he was very capricious about so doing. On certain days he refused them a sou; the next day he would offer large sums—

always, though, at high interest and on undoubtedly good security. He was a good Catholic, went regularly to the services, and always attended the earliest mass at Saint-Martin's; and as he had purchased there a chapel in perpetuity, as elsewhere, he was separated even in church from other Christians. A popular proverb of that day, and was long remembered, was the saying: "You passed in front of the usurer; evil will befall you." To pass in front of the Fleming explained every misfortune; it explained all sudden pains and evil, involuntary depression, bad turns of fortune among the people of Tours. Even at Court the people most oftener than not attributed to Cornélius that fatal influence which Italian, Spanish, and Asiatic superstition has termed the "Evil Eye."

Only for the terrible power of Louis XI., which overspread his house like a mantle, the populace on the least pretext would have utterly demolished la Malemaison—that "evil house" in the Rue du Mûrier. And yet it was Cornélius that was the first to plant mulberry trees in Tours, and at that time the Tourangeaux looked upon him as their good genie. Who may depend on popular favor?

A few seigneurs having met Maître Cornélius on his journeys out of France had been astonished at his friendliness and good-humor. At Tours he was always gloomy and absent-minded, but yet he returned there. Some inexplicable attraction brought him back to his dismal house in the Rue du Mûrier. Like a snail, whose life is so strongly a part of its shell, he admitted to the King that he was not at his ease elsewhere; he only found it under the bolts and time-worn stone of his little bastille; and yet he was well aware that should the King die it would be the most dangerous spot on earth for him.

"The devil is amusing himself at the expense of our crony the *torçonnier*," said Louis XI. to his barber, a few days before the festival of All-Saints. "He says he has been robbed again, but he can't hang anybody this time, unless he hangs

himself. The old vagabond came and asked me if I had not chanced to carry off a string of rubies that he had intended selling to me. '*Pasques-Dieu!* I don't steal what I have only to take,' said I."

"And was he afraid?" asked the barber.

"Misers are only afraid of one thing," responded the King. "My chum the *torçonnier* knows very well that I shall not plunder him for nothing; otherwise I were unjust, and I have never yet done anything but what is just and necessary."

"And yet that old bandit overcharges you," replied the barber.

"You only wish he did, don't you?" answered the King, with a sinister look at the barber.

"By Mahomet's belly, Sire, the inheritance would be a noble one, between you, me, and the devil."

"There, there!" said the King. "Don't put bad ideas into my head. My crony is a more faithful man than many whose fortunes I have made—it may be it is because he owes me nothing."

For the two last years, Maître Cornélius had lived entirely alone with his old sister, who was believed to be a witch. A tailor who lived hard by declared that he had frequently seen her at night, on the roof the house, looking out for the witches' Sabbath. This seemed the more extraordinary, as it was known to be the miser's custom to lock up his sister in her bedroom when night came, the windows of which were barred with iron.

As he grew older, Cornélius, always afraid of being robbed or duped by men, came to hate everybody but the King, whom he highly esteemed. He had sunk into a state of abject misanthropy; but, like most misers, his passion for gold, the assimilation, as it were, of that metal with his very substance, became more and more complete, while age but intensified it. He was even suspicious of his sister, though she was a shade the more miserly and rapacious than her brother, and

really surpassed him in penurious inventiveness. Their way of life was a mysterious enigma. The old woman rarely took bread of the baker; so seldom she appeared in the market, that the least credulous of the townsfolk at last attributed to her some diabolical knowledge of a secret for maintaining life. Others there were who dabbled in alchemy that declared that Maître Cornélius possessed the power of making gold. Men of science stated that he had discovered the Universal Panacea. According to most of the country people, when they spoke of him, Cornélius was a chimerical being, and a number came to view his house out of mere curiosity.

The young seigneur, whom we left in front of that house, looked about him, first at the Hôtel de Poitiers, the home of his mistress, and then at the Malemaison. The moonbeams shed their light on the prominent parts, giving a tint of light and shadow in the carvings and reliefs. The caprices of this white light gave a sinister expression to both edifices; it seemed as if Nature had tried to encourage the superstitious dread that hung around the place.

The young man called to mind the many traditions which made Cornélius such a strange and formidable person. Though the violence of his passion still held him to the decision of entering that house, and to stay there long enough to accomplish his purpose, he yet hesitated at taking the final step, all the time aware that he would at last do this. But what man is there who, in a crisis of his life, does not willingly pay heed to presentiments, and gyrate, as it were, over the precipice of uncertainty? A lover worthy of his love, the young man feared he might perish before the love of the countess should crown his life.

His mental deliberation was so painfully absorbing that he did not feel the cold wind that whistled round his legs and against the buildings. On entering that house he must lay aside his name, as he already had laid aside the handsome garb of a noble. In case of disaster he would be unable to claim the

privileges of his rank or the protection of his friends without destroying the Countess of Saint-Vallier. If her old husband suspected her of having a lover paying nocturnal visits, he was quite capable of roasting her alive in an iron cage by a slow fire, or of killing her by degrees in the depths of some dank dungeon.

Looking over his shabby clothes in which he was disguised, the young man felt ashamed of his appearance. His black leather belt, his heavy shoes, ribbed hose, frieze breeches, and his gray woolen doublet made him look like the clerk of some poor devil of a justice. To a nobleman of the fifteenth century it was like to death itself to play the part of a mean burgher, and renounce the privileges of his rank. But yet, to climb the roof of the house where his mistress was weeping; to descend the chimney or crawl along the cornice from gutter to gutter to the window of her room; to risk his life if haply he might sit by her side before a glowing fire, during the slumber of a dangerous husband, whose every snore would add to their rapture; to defy both heaven and earth in exchanging the most audacious embrace; to say no word which would not be the certainty of death, or at least of bloody combat, if overheard—these all-entrancing visions, with the romantic perils of the adventure, made the decision of the young man.

However slight the guerdon of his endeavor might be, could he but once more kiss the hand of his lady, he would venture all, urged on by the peril-loving, passionate spirit of his age. Never for one moment did he think that the countess would refuse him the sweetest reward of love in the midst of such mortal danger. The adventure was too perilous, too impossible, not to be attempted to carry out.

Suddenly every bell in the town rang out the curfew—a custom elsewhere fallen into desuetude, but was still observed in the country—for in the provinces customs die slowly. Though the lights were not extinguished, the watchman placed the chains across the streets. Many doors were barred

and bolted ; the steps of a few belated citizens were heard in the distance, attended by their servants, armed to the teeth and bearing lanterns. Soon the town, garroted, as it were, seemed to be slumbering, fearing naught of robbers and malefactors except by the roofs. At that time the roofs of houses were like a highway, so thronged were they at night.

The streets were so narrow in the country towns, and even in Paris, that robbers could jump from the roofs on one side on to those of the other. This perilous game was once the delight of King Charles IX. in his youth, if we may put faith in the chronicles of his day.

Fearing that he might be too late in presenting himself to the old Maître Cornélius, the young noble now went up to the Malemaison, intending to knock at the door, when, on looking at it, his attention was excited by a kind of vision, which the writers of that day would have termed devilish (*cornue*), perhaps with reference to horns and hoofs. He rubbed his eyes to clear them, a thousand diverse ideas coursing through his mind the while at the spectacle before him. On each side of the door was a face framed between the bars in a kind of loophole. At first he took these faces to be grotesque gargoyles carved in stone, so angular, so distorted, exaggerated, motionless, and discolored were they ; but presently the cold wind and the moonlight enabled him to detect the thin white mist which living breath sent out from two blue noses ; at last he could make out in each hollow face, beneath the shadow of the eyebrows, a pair of blue china eyes casting fire like those of a wolf crouching in the brushwood when it hears the bay of the hounds in full cry. The uneasy gleam of those eyes was turned on him so fixedly that for quite a minute's space he felt like a bird put up by a pointer-dog ; a fever-spasm struck his soul, but it was at once repressed. The two faces, strained and suspicious, were beyond a doubt those of Cornélius and his sister.

The young man pretended to be gazing around him, as if

in uncertainty as to his whereabouts, and to be searching for a dwelling the address of which might be on the card he took from his pocket and was trying to read by the moonlight ; then straight to the door he walked and struck three blows upon it, which echoed within as though it had been the entrance to a cavern. A faint light became visible beneath the door, and an eye was seen at a small and strongly barred wicket-gate.

“ Who is there ? ”

“ A friend, sent by Oosterlinck, of Brussels.”

“ What do you want ? ”

“ To come in.”

“ Your name ? ”

“ Philippe Goulenoire.”

“ Have you credentials ? ”

“ Here they are.”

“ Put them in through the box.”

“ Where is it ? ”

“ To your left.”

Philippe Goulenoire put the letter through the slit of an iron box above which was a loophole.

“ The devil ! ” thought he. “ It is very evident that the King comes here, as they say he does ; he could not take more precautions at le Plessis.”

For over a quarter of an hour he waited on the street. At the end of that time he heard the old man say to his sister :

“ Close the traps of the door.”

A clanging of chains sounded from within. Philippe heard the bolts slide, the locks creak, and finally a small, low door, iron-bound, opened just the smallest chink through which a man could press. At the risk of tearing his clothes, Philippe squeezed rather than walked himself into la Malemaison. A toothless old woman with a hatchet face, eyebrows like the handle of a caldron, who could not have put a nut between her nose and chin so near were they together—a pallid, hag-

gard creature, her hollow temples made up only, or so it seemed, of bones and sinews—silently preceded the stranger into a lower chamber, Cornélius prudently following him.

“Seat yourself there,” said she to Philippe, pointing out a three-legged stool, standing beside a huge, carved fireplace of stone; the hearth though was fireless.

On the other side of the fireplace was a walnut-wood table with twisted legs, on which were an egg on a plate and ten or a dozen of little bread-sops, hard and dry, each cut with parsimonious exactitude. Two stools placed beside the table, on one of which the old woman seated herself, showed that the miserly pair were about supping.

Cornélius went to the door and closed two iron shutters, thus most likely securing the looped windows through which they had been gazing out on the street; then he returned to his seat. Philippe Goulenoire, as he called himself, next saw the brother and sister dipping each their sops in turns into the egg, and with the perfect gravity and precision that soldiers use in dipping their spoons in regular rotation into the mess-pan. This performance was gone through in perfect silence. But as he ate Cornélius studied the mock apprentice with as much carefulness and shrewdness as if he had been gold coin in the balance.

Philippe felt, as it might be, an icy cloak had fallen on his shoulders, he was tempted to look around; but with the circumspection born of an amorous adventure he was careful not to glance, even furtively, at the walls, for he was well aware that so suspicious a person as Cornélius would not house an inquisitive inmate. He restricted himself to the modest contemplation of first the egg, then the old woman, and anon his future master.

Louis XI.'s silversmith-treasurer resembled that monarch. He had even caught the same tricks of expression, as often happens where persons dwell in a kind of quasi intimacy. The thick eyebrows of the Fleming almost concealed his eyes,

but by raising them a little he could flash out a glance that was bright, penetrating, and full of power, the look of men habituated to silence, and to whom concentration of thought is familiar. His thin lips, finely furrowed with vertical lines, gave him an air of keen subtlety. The lower part of the face bore a vague resemblance to a fox; but a lofty, prominent forehead, deeply indented with wrinkles, bespoke great and noble qualities and nobility of soul—one whose flights had been degraded by experience and whence the cruel lessons of life had driven it back into the farthest recesses of his strange humanity. Most certainly he was no ordinary miser; his passion covered, no doubt, the highest pleasures and secret conceptions.

“At what rate are Venetian sequins going?” he abruptly asked his to be apprentice.

“Three-fourths at Brussels; one at Ghent.”

“What is the freight on the Scheldt?”

“Three sous paris.

“Anything new in Ghent?”

“The brother of Liéven d’Herde is ruined.”

“Ah!”

After giving vent to this exclamation, the old man spread the skirts of his dalmation over his knees—this was a sort of robe made of black velvet, open in front, wide sleeves, no collar, the sumptuous material being much worn and shiny. This corpse of a magnificent costume he had formerly worn as president of the tribunal of the Parchons—a position which had earned him the enmity of the Duke of Burgundy—was now but a mere rag.

Philippe was not cold, he perspired in the harness he had assumed, dreading further questioning. Thus far the brief information he had extracted the day before, from a Jew whose life he had saved, had been enough—thanks to his good memory and to the Jew’s perfect understanding of the customs of Maître Cornélius and his habits and manners.

But the young man, who in his first flush of enthusiasm had feared nothing, now began to perceive the difficulties of his undertaking. The solemn, grave manner of the Fleming reacted upon himself; he felt himself under lock and key and remembered that the urbane Grand Provost Tristan and his rope obeyed the behest of Maître Cornélius.

"Have you supped?" asked the miser in a tone which implied an affirmative answer.

The old maid, despite her brother's tone, trembled as she looked at the new inmate, as if gauging the capacity of the stomach she might have to fill, then said with a specious grin:

"You do not belie your name; your hair and mustache are both black as the devil's tail."

"I have supped," said he.

"Well, then," replied the usurer, "you can come and see me again to-morrow. I have had no apprentice for a number years. Beside, in the night comes wisdom."

"Hey! by Saint-Bavon, monsieur, I am from Flanders; I know not one soul in this place; the chains are up in the streets; I shall be thrown into prison. However," he went on, alarmed at his own temerity, "if it suits your good pleasure, of course I will go."

The oath had a singular effect on the old man.

"Come, then, by Saint-Bavon! You shall sleep here."

"But——" began his sister.

"Silence," said Cornélius. "In his letter Oosterlinck says that he will be answerable for this young man. You well know," he whispered in his sister's ear, "that we have a hundred thousand livres here belonging to Oosterlinck. Is that not security enough?"

"And suppose he steals the Bavarian jewels? He looks more like a thief than a Fleming."

"Hark!" said the old man listening attentively.

The two misers listened. An instant after the "hark"

uttered by Cornélius, a noise caused by men's footsteps echoed in the distance on the other side of the town moat.

"The guard of le Plessis is on its rounds," said the sister.

"Give me the key to the apprentices' room," Cornélius continued.

The old woman was about to take up the lamp.

"What, do you mean to leave us alone together without a light?" exclaimed Cornélius in a voice eloquent with some hidden meaning. "Old as you are you ought to be able to see in the dark. It is not so difficult to find a key."

The sister evidently understood the meaning hidden in these words and left the room. As he looked at this singular creature, as she made her way toward the door, Philippe was able to hide the glance from Cornélius that he cast around the room. It was wainscoted half-way up with oak, the walls were hung with yellow leather stamped out with black arabesques; but what most struck the young man was a match-lock musket with its long spring dagger attached. This then new and terrible weapon lay close to Cornélius.

"How do you expect to earn your living with me?" asked the miser.

"I have but little money," said Philippe, "but I know some good business schemes. If you give me but one sou on every mark I make you, I shall be satisfied."

"A sou! a sou," spoke out the miser, "why that's a great deal!"

At this time reëntered the old hag with the key.

"Come," said Cornélius to Philippe.

The pair went out beneath the portico and mounted a spiral stairway of stone the circular well of which rose through a turret by the side of the room they had occupied. On the second floor the young man came to a stand.

"Nay, nay," cried Cornélius, "the devil! why, this is the cranny in which the King enjoys himself."

The architect had constructed the room used for the ap-

prentices' lodging under the pointed roof of the turret up which the stairs wound. It was a little circular room, the walls of stone, cold and bare of ornament. The tower stood in the centre of the facade on the courtyard, which was like all country courtyards—narrow and dark. At the farther end, through an iron grating, could be seen a wretched garden, in which only the mulberries grew that Cornélius had introduced. The young noble could take in these details through the loopholes of the turret, the moon, luckily, casting a brilliant light.

A cot, a stool, an unmatched pitcher and basin, and a flimsy chest comprised the furniture in the room. The light could only enter through little square slits, placed at intervals in the wall of the tower, corresponding, no doubt, to the ornamentation of the outside.

"Here is your lodging," said Cornélius; "it is plain and substantial, and contains all that is needed for sleep. Good-night! Do not leave this room as the others did."

After giving his apprentice a last look fraught with divers meanings, Cornélius double-locked the door, took away the key and went down the stairs, leaving the young fellow as much befooled as a bell-founder who on opening his mould finds it empty. Alone, without a light, seated on a stool in this small garret-room from which so many of his predecessors had gone to the gallows, the young noble felt like a wild beast caught in a trap. He jumped on to the stool and stood on tip-toe to peer out of one of the little slits through which shone a faint glimmer of light. From thence he could see the Loire, the lovely slopes of Saint-Cyr, the sombre splendeur of le Plessis, where a few lights were gleaming in the deep recesses of the windows. Farther away lay the beautiful meadows of Touraine and the silvery stream of the great river. Every point of this lovely landscape wore, just then, a mysterious charm; the windows, the waters, the roofs of the houses glistened like diamonds in the trembling rays of the moon.

The soul of the young noble could not altogether repress some tender, sweet and sad emotions.

"Suppose this is my last farewell!" said he to himself.

As he stood there, he already felt the terrible emotion his adventure promised him; he yielded to the fears of a prisoner who still retains a gleam of hope. His mistress brightened each difficulty. To him she was no more a woman, she became a supernatural being seen in the incense vapors of his hot desire. A feeble cry, which seemed to come from the Hôtel de Poitiers, restored him to reason and to a realization of his situation. He threw himself on his bed to meditate on his course; soon he heard a slight rustling sound which came from the spiral staircase. He listened with all his ears, when the whispered words: "He is in bed," uttered by the old woman, came to his ear.

By an accident of which the architect was ignorant, the lightest sound on the stairway was echoed in the room of the apprentices, so the ostensible apprentice did not miss a single movement of the old miser and his sister, who were spying upon him. He undressed, got into bed, and pretended to sleep; during the time the couple remained on the stairs he was employed in devising means to escape his prison and his entry of the Hôtel de Poitiers.

About ten o'clock Cornélius and his sister, convinced that the new inmate was asleep, retired to their own rooms.

The young man paid careful attention to the sound they made in thus doing, and thought he could guess as to the rooms they each occupied; they must, he thought, occupy the whole of the second floor.

Like all the houses of that date, this floor was next below the roof, from which its dormer windows projected, which were adorned with tops of richly sculptured stone. The roof was bordered with a kind of balustrade, which concealed the gutters for the descent of the rain-water which gargoyles, like crocodiles' heads, discharged into the street. The youth, who

had so carefully studied his bearings like as a cat might cunningly have done, believed he could make his way from the tower to the roof, thence to Madame de Vallier's room by the waterspouts and gargoyles; but he had not counted on the narrowness of the windows in the turret; it was a manifest impossibility that he could pass through them. He now made up his mind to get upon the roof of the house through the window of the staircase on the second story. To accomplish this bold project he must have egress from his room—— and Cornélius had carried off the key!

The young noble had taken the precaution of bringing with him, concealed under his clothes, one of those poinards used at that time for dealing the *coup-de-grâce* in a duel, when the vanquished adversary begged the victor to dispatch him. This horrible weapon had one edge sharpened like a razor, and the other one was toothed like a saw, but the teeth running in the reverse direction to that by which it would enter the body in the thrust. The youth purposed to use this latter edge as a saw to cut the wood through around the lock. Happily for him the staple of the lock was attached to the outside of the door by four stout screws. By the help of his dagger he contrived, not without much difficulty, to unscrew and remove this altogether; he carefully laid aside the staple and the four screws, and proceeded down the stairs without his shoes to reconnoitre the locality. It was midnight when he was free.

He was quite astonished to discover a wide-open door to a corridor leading to several chambers, at the end of which passage was a window opening on to the V-shaped roof connecting the roofs of the Hôtel de Poitiers and the "evil house," which there met. Nothing could express his joy, unless it be the vow which he forthwith made to the Blessed Virgin to found a mass in her honor at the noted parish church of the Escrignoles, at Tours.

After examining the vast, tall chimneys of the Hôtel de

Poitiers, he retraced his steps to fetch his poinard ; he saw, to his terror, a bright light upon the stairs, and Maître Cornélius himself in his dalmation, carrying a lamp, holding it out as far as possible, his eyes open to their fullest extent and fixed upon the corridor, at the entrance of which he stood still as a spectre.

“ If I open the window and jump out upon the roof, he will hear me,” thought the young man.

But the terrible old man was coming on—coming like the hour of death stealing upon the criminal. In this extremity Philippe, his wits quickened by love, recovered his presence of mind ; he slipped into a doorway, squeezing himself into the angle of it, and awaited the old man’s passing him. As soon as Cornélius, holding his lamp in advance, came into line with the current of air which the young man ejected from his lungs, the light was blown out.

Cornélius uttered a Dutch oath and muttered some vague phrases ; but he turned around and retraced his footsteps. Then the noble hurriedly sought his room and the poinard, returned with the latter to his so blessed window, softly opened it, and sprang out upon the roof.

Once free and under the open sky, he felt weak, so deliriously happy was he. The excitement of the danger, or the audacity of his enterprise, caused his emotion ; victory is to the full as perilous as the battle. He leaned against the parapet, quivering in his satisfaction, and said to himself :

“ By which of these chimneys, now, can I get into her room ? ”

He looked at them all. With the instinct of a lover, he touched each in turn to judge by the feel in which there had been a fire. When his mind was made up on this point, the daring young man securely stuck his poinard in the joint between two stones, attached to it a silken ladder, threw the latter down the chimney, and then, trusting to his good blade and the chance of having selected the route to his mistress’

room, without a tremor descended. He knew not whether Saint-Vallier was asleep or awake ; but one thing he did know, and that was that he would embrace the countess, even if it should be at the price of two men's lives.

Presently his feet touched warm embers ; he gently trod them ; more gently yet he stooped down and saw the countess seated in an armchair.

And she saw him.

By the light of the lamp, the timid being, pale and palpitating with pleasurable emotions, pointed to the Comte de Saint-Vallier lying in bed, about ten feet away from her. You may suppose that their burning, silent kisses echoed only in their hearts.

The next day, about nine in the morning, as Louis XI. was leaving his chapel after attending mass, he found Maître Cornélius in his path.

"Good-luck, crony," said he, straightening his cap in his usual jerky manner.

"Sire, I would willingly pay you a thousand gold crowns if I could have a moment's speech with your majesty ; I have discovered the thief who stole the rubies and all the jewels of the Duke——"

"Let us hear about this," said Louis XI., going into the courtyard of le Plessis, followed by his silversmith, Coyctier his physician, Olivier le Daim, and the captain of the Scottish Guard. "Tell me this business. Another man to hang for you ! Halloo, Tristan !"

The grand provost, who was marching up and down the courtyard, came with slow steps, like a dog proud of his fidelity. The group paused under a tree. The King seated himself on a bench and the courtiers formed a circle around him.

"Sire, a man pretending to be a Fleming has entrapped and got the better of me——" began Cornélius.

"Indeed, then he must be crafty," said the King, wagging his head.

"Yes, truly," answered the silversmith. "But methinks he would have snared even yourself. How should I distrust a poor beggar recommended to me by Oosterlinck, a man for whom I hold a hundred thousand livres? Nay, I will wager that the Jew's letter and seal were forged! In short, Sire, I found myself this morning robbed of those jewels you praised so admiringly. They have been ravished from me, Sire! To steal the jewels of the Elector of Bavaria! The scoundrels will stop at nothing! They'll steal your kingdom if you don't look out. They respect no one!

"As soon as I missed the jewels I went up to the room of that apprentice, who is certainly a pastmaster in thievery. This time proof is not lacking. He had forced the lock of his door. The moon was down when he returned to his room, so he couldn't find all the screws. By good chance I trod upon one as I entered his room. He was sound asleep, the wretch, tired out. Just fancy, gentlemen, he climbed into my strong room by way of the chimney. To-morrow, or perhaps to-night, I'll make it hot for him though. We can always learn something from these villains. He had a silk ladder about him, and his clothes were marked with the dust of the roofs over which he had clambered, and the soot of the chimney down which he had descended. He intended remaining with me and robbing me night after night, the bold villain! But where has he hid the jewels? The country-folk coming early into town saw him on the roof. He must have had accomplices, who waited for him on that dyke you made. Ah! Sire, you are the accomplice of fellows who come in boats; when, crack! they carry off everything and leave never a trace! But we hold this fellow, this leader, as a key, the horrid miscreant, the daring scapegrace. Ah! but he'll be a dainty morsel for the gibbet; with a screw or two of *questioning* beforehand, he will tell all. And the honor of

your reign is concerned in it—is it not? There ought not to be robbers in the realm of so great a King.”

But for long the King had ceased to listen. He had fallen into one of those gloomy meditations which became so frequent and ominous in the latter period of his life. A deep silence reigned.

“This is your business,” said he at length to Tristan. “Search ye it out.”

He rose, walked a few steps, and the courtiers left him alone. He then perceived Cornélius, who, mounted on his mule, was riding away in the company of the grand provost.

“And the thousand gold crowns?” shouted the King after him.

“Ah! Sire, you are too great a King! No sum can pay for your justice!”

Louis XI. smiled. The courtiers envied the old Fleming his bold speech and privileges, as he passed off at a good pace down the avenue of young mulberry trees leading from Tours to le Plessis.

Exhausted with fatigue, the young siegneur was sleeping soundly. When he returned from his gallant adventure the spirit which had carried him through ceased to act in giving him the ability to defend himself against distant or imaginary dangers; he was no longer rashly pursuing anticipated joys. He postponed until the morrow the cleansing of his soiled garb; a great blunder, to which all else conspired. It is true that the moon had failed him; through this he was unable to find all the screws belonging to the cursed lock, he was impatient. Then with the happy-go-lucky indifference of a tired man he trusted to chance which had served him so well. He did, indeed, make a bargain with himself to awake at the dawn, but the events of the day and the tumults of the night prevented his keeping the promise. Happiness is forgetful. Cornélius was no longer, so it seemed, formidable to him, as he flung himself down on the truckle-bed where so many poor

wretches had awoke to their doom. This recklessness was his ruin.

While the King's silversmith was returning from le Plessis, in the company of the grand provost and his redoubtable bowmen, the pretended Goulenoire was being watched by the old sister, who was seated on the spiral stairs, knitting stockings and paying no heed to the cold.

The young man continued to dream of the ravishing enchantments of the charming night, in full ignorance of that danger which was rushing upon him at a hand-gallop. He saw himself on a cushion at the feet of the countess, his head on her knees warm with affection's fire.

He was dreaming.

He listened to the story of her persecutions and the full details of the count's petty tyranny; he wept over the lot of the unhappy lady, who was, in truth, the one natural daughter of Louis XI., who was best beloved by him. He promised her that to-morrow he would go to the King and reveal her wrongs to that terrible father; everything, he assured her, should be satisfactorily arranged as she might wish, the marriage annulled, the husband banished—while they themselves might be the victims of his sword, so perilously near, if the slightest noise should awaken him. But in his dreams, the gleam of the lamp, the flame of their eyes, the colors of the stuffs and draperies were more vivid, brighter than in reality; a more delightful perfume exhaled from their night-dresses; there was more of love in the air, more fire in the atmosphere than there had really been. The Marie of his dream did not so strongly resist his advances as the living Marie had done. The adoring glances, those tender entreaties, those adroit silences, those voluptuous solicitations, the affected generosity, which render the first moments of a passion so fiercely ardent, which arouse a fresh delirium at each new step toward love, were less objected to.

In obedience to the amorous jurisprudence of the period,

Marie de Saint-Vallier granted her lover all the superficial privileges of the tender passion, *la petite oie*.* She willingly allowed him to kiss her feet, her robe, her hands, her throat; she avowed her love; she accepted his vows and attentions; she consented for him to die for her; she yielded to an intoxication which the rigor of her half-chasteness intensified; further than that she could not be induced to go—she made her deliverance the guerdon of the highest surrender to his love.

In order to have a marriage annulled, in those days, it was necessary to apply to Rome; to obtain the help of certain cardinals, and to personally appear before the sovereign pontiff armed with the approval of the King. Marie was firm in desiring to be free to love, that she might freely give it to the one she loved.

Almost every woman in those days had enough of power to establish her empire in the heart of a man in such manner as to make that passion the history of his life, the principle of his noblest resolves. Women were then a power in France, they were sovereigns; they had noble pride; their lovers far more belonged to them than they to their lovers; their love was often the cause of bloodshed, but this must be faced to become a lover. But this Marie of his dream was gracious; she was deeply moved by her lover's devotion; she made but small defense against his vehement onslaught.

Which one was true? Did the false apprentice see the real woman in his dream? Was the lady he saw in the Hôtel de Poitiers only assuming virtue's mask? This question it is difficult to decide; it is too delicate; woman's honor demands, as it were, that it should remain unanswered.

At the instant that the Marie of the dream may have been about to forget her high dignity as his mistress, the lover found himself in the grasp of an iron hand, and the sharp tones of the grand provost, as he thus addressed him:

* Lit.: the little goose.

"Come, you Christian of midnight, who feel around the roofs for God, wake up, come!"

The young man saw the black face of Tristan d'Hermite above him; he recognized his sardonic leer; then on the steps of the corkscrew stairway he saw Cornélius and his sister, while beyond them were the provost guards. At that sight and noticing the diabolical visages, expressive of either hatred or curiosity of persons accustomed to hanging people, the whilom Philippe Goulenoire sat up on his bed and rubbed his eyes.

"'Sdeath!" he exclaimed, seizing the poinard which was under his pillow. "Now is the time for our knives to play."

"Ho, ho!" cried Tristan, "that's the speech of a noble. It seemeth me that here is Georges de Estouteville, nephew of the grandmaster of bowmen."

Hearing his real name uttered by Tristan, young d'Estouteville thought less of himself than of the danger his recognition would cause his unhappy mistress. To avert suspicion he cried out:

"By Mahomet's belly! help, help, comrades, help!"

After this terrible outcry, and made really in despair, the young courtier gave a bound, poinard in hand, and reached the landing on the stairs. But the myrmidons of the grand provost were well up in such games. As Georges d'Estouteville reached the stairs they most dexterously seized him, not at all alarmed at the vigorous lunges he made at them with his dagger, which, fortunately for the man at whom it was aimed, slipped on his corslet. He was disarmed, his arms tied, and he was thrown on the bed before the provost, who stood motionless, thinking.

Tristan looked for a moment, without speaking, at the prisoner's hands; he scratched his chin and pointed Cornélius to them, and said:

"Those are no vagabond's hands, neither are they those of an apprentice. He is a noble."

"Say a thief, rather!" retorted the Fleming. "My good Tristan, whether noble or serf, he has undone me, the villain. I would that this moment I could see his feet warming in your pretty boots. Beyond any doubt he is the chief of that gang of invisible devils who know all my secrets, open my locks, rob me, kill me by inches. They are rich with my wealth, Tristan. Ah! this time, though, we will recover the treasure, for this fellow has the face of the King of Egypt. I shall recover my so precious rubies, all the sums I have lost; our good King shall have his division of the spoil."

"Oh, our hiding-places are more secret than yours," said Georges, smiling.

"Ah, the damned villain, he confesses!" cried the miser.

The provost during this time had been carefully examining Georges' clothing and the lock of the door.

"How did you remove those screws?" asked Tristan.

Georges kept silent.

"Oh, all right; hold your tongue if you wish. You will soon confess to Saint Rackbones," said the provost.

"Now you talk business!" cried Cornélius.

"Away with him," said the grand provost.

Georges d'Estouteville asked permission to dress himself. On a sign from their chief the guard put on his clothing with the deft rapidity of a nurse who is changing a baby's dress during a moment's quietude.

An immense throng had assembled in the Rue du Mûrier. The growling increased with every moment, and had the sound of an incipient riot. Rumors of the theft had been prevalent since early morning. On all sides popular favor was aroused on behalf of the apprentice, who was said to be young and handsome; while the hatred against Cornélius had revived afresh. There was not a young woman with fresh cheeks and pretty feet to exhibit, nor a mother's son in all the town, but was determined on seeing the victim. When Georges issued from the house there was a frightful uproar in

the street, as he was seen led by one of the guard, who, after he had mounted his horse, kept the twisted end of the strong leathern thong that bound his prisoner's arms.

Whether it was that the mob merely wished to see this new victim, or whether rescue was intended, the people behind pushed those in front close upon the little squad of cavalry posted outside the Malemaison. At this time, Cornélius and his sister slammed the door and banged the shutters to with the violence of panic-terror. Tristan was not accustomed to respect the populace, as in those days they were not yet the "sovereign people," and cared but little for a probable riot.

"Push on! Push on!" he cried to his men.

At his voice the bowmen spurred their horses toward the end of the street. The crowd seeing a few persons knocked down and trampled by the horses, and others crushed up against the walls of the houses and nearly suffocated, took the wise course of returning to their homes.

"Make way for the King's justice!" cried Tristan. "What are you doing here? Do some of you want hanging, too? Go home, good people; your dinner is being burned. Here, my good dame, your husband's hose need mending, get off home and darn them, get back to your needles."

Though this jocular speech showed that the grand provost was in a good humor, the most obstreperous fled before them as if he were the Black Plague itself.

At the time the crowd began to give somewhat, Georges de Estouteville was astounded to see at one of the windows of the Hôtel de Poitiers his beloved Marie de Saint-Vallier, laughing with the count. She was mocking at *him*, the poor devoted lover, who was going to his death for her. But, perhaps, she was only amused by seeing the caps of the populace knocked off by the spears of the bowmen.

One must be twenty-three years old, rich in illusions, fully able to believe in a woman's love, must love with all the power of our life, risking it with pleasure on the handsel of a

kiss, and then be betrayed to comprehend the fury of hatred and despair which shook Georges de Estouteville's heart at the sight of his laughing mistress, who only vouchsafed him a cold, indifferent glance. Without a doubt she had been there some time, for her arms rested on a cushion; she was quite at her ease and her old mountebank seemed content. He, too, was laughing—all curses on the hunchback!

A few tears ran from the young man's eyes; but when Marie saw them she hastily drew back. The tears, though, were suddenly dried when Georges beheld the red and white plumes of the page who was in his interest. The count did not notice the movements of this cautious page, for he advanced to his mistress on tip-toe. After he had spoken a few words in her ear, Marie returned to the window. She managed to elude the watchful eye of her tyrant for a moment and cast upon Georges a look that was bright with the fires of love—and the triumph of having so skillfully deceived her Argus—a glance that seemed to say:

“I am watching over you.”

Had she cried aloud these words to him, she could not more have impressed them upon his hearing; that glance was full of a thousand thoughts, it was charged with the terrors, hopes, pleasure, of their situation. He had passed in that one second from heaven to martyrdom, from martyrdom back to heaven! So, then, this brave young man, light-hearted and content, walked gayly to his doom; he adjudged the horrors of the grim “question” but a small price for the rapture of his love.

As Tristan was turning off the Rue du Mûrier, his men halted as an officer of the Scottish Guard rode toward them at full tilt.

“What is to do?” asked the provost.

“Naught concerning you,” replied the officer, scornfully.

“The King sends me to summon the Comte and Comtesse de Saint-Vallier, whom he bids dine with him.”

The grand provost had barely reached the quay of le Plessis

when the count and countess, both riding, he on his horse, she on a white mule, and followed by their pages, joined the bowmen, intending to enter Plessis-le-Tours in their company. All were moving slowly. Georges was on foot between two mounted guards, one of whom still held him by the leathern thong.

Tristan, the count, and his wife naturally led the van; the criminal followed them. The young page mingled with the bowmen and questioned them, at times addressing the prisoner; he contrived with some cunning to say to him in a low voice:

"I got over the garden-wall of le Plessis and took a missive to the King from madame. She was nearly dying when she learned of your arrest for theft. Be of good courage. She now goes to the King to speak for you."

Already had love given wiliness and courage to the countess. The laughter she had forced was part of the heroism women can display in the great crises of life.

Despite the singular fancy which possessed the author of "Quentin Durward" to place the royal château of Plessis-le-Tours on an eminence, we must content ourselves in leaving it where it really was situated, that is, on the low land, protected on either side by the Cher and the Loire; also by the Canal Sainte-Anne, so named in honor of his well-loved daughter, Madame du Beaujeu. By uniting the two rivers between Tours and le Plessis, this canal served as a formidable further protection to the castle, and was also valuable as a highway for commerce. On that side toward Bréhémont, a broad, fertile plain, the park was inclosed by a moat, the remains of which still show its extent and depth.

At a period when the power of artillery was still in embryo, the position of le Plessis, long the favorite retreat of Louis XI., might be considered impregnable. The château, built of brick and stone, was in no way remarkable; but surrounding it were noble trees, and from its windows could be seen through

the well-arranged vistas* the loveliest views imaginable. No rival place was to be found near this solitary castle, which stood in the very centre of the little plain reserved for the King and guarded by four streams of water.

If tradition may be relied upon, Louis XI. occupied the West wing, and from his chamber could see at one glance the course of the Loire, the pretty valley watered by the Croisville, and some part of the slopes of Saint-Cyr. From the windows opening on the courtyard he could see the entrance to his fortress and the dyke by which he had connected his favorite residence with the city of Tours. The suspicious disposition of the King gives much weight to this tradition. It is certain that had Louis XI. bestowed upon the building of his castle the luxury of architecture which François I. afterward displayed at Chambord, the royal residence of France would always have remained in Touraine. This lovely spot and exquisite scenery need only to be seen to at once establish its superiority over all other royal residences in the fair realm of France.

Louis XI., now in his fifty-seventh year, had scarcely more than three years of life before him ; already he began to feel death's approach by many attacks of that illness which was to prove mortal ; delivered from his enemies ; on the point of adding to his territories by absorbing the possessions of the duchy of Burgundy, through the marriage of the dauphin and Marguerite, the sole heiress of that dukedom—which marriage was arranged by Desquerdes, the captain-general of his army in Flanders ; having established his authority throughout his realm ; now meditating ameliorations and improvements of every description in the kingdom, he found time slipping from his grasp, no troubles remaining to him save those of old age. Deceived by every one, even by the minions nearest him, experience had increased his natural distrust. The desire to live had become in him the egotism of a king who has be-

* *Plexitium*.

come incarnate in his subjects; he craved long life in which to carry out vast designs.

Everything that the commonsense of statesmen of spirit or the genius of revolution has since introduced of change in the monarchy, Louis XI. had devised. Equality of taxation, and of people before the law—the Sovereign being then the Law—were the objects for which he endeavored. On the eve of All-Saints he had gathered together the learned goldsmiths of France for the purpose of establishing in his kingdom a system of uniform weights and measures. He had already established a uniform power. Thus his great spirit soared like an eagle above his realm, joining, singular but true, the prudence of a king to the idiosyncrasies of a man of genius.

At no period of our history has Monarchy's figure been greater or more majestic. Amazing contrast! A great mind in a frail body; an unbelieving spirit as concerned the mundane, a devout believer in all the practices of religion; a man struggling against two powers greater than his own—the present, the future; the future in which he dreaded eternal torment, a fear causing him to sacrifice largely to the church; the present, his own life, for the saving of which he was the slave of Coyctier. This King, who could crush all about him, was himself crushed by remorse, by disease, in the midst of that mysterious poem—the combat of Man in his highest manifestations of power tilting against nature.

It was stupendous, it was impressive.

While awaiting his dinner, which, in those days, was partaken between eleven o'clock and noon, Louis XI., after a short walk, sat down in a large, tapestried chair near the fire in his private chamber. Olivier le Daim and Coyctier, the leech, looked at each other without a word, standing in a window recess and watching their master, who was sleeping. The only sound to be heard was the steps of the two chamberlains as they paced back and forth in the anteroom, the Sire de Montrésor and Jean Dufou, Sire de Montbazon. These

two seigneurs of Touraine kept an eye on the captain of the Scottish Guard, who, according to his usual custom, was sleeping in his chair.

The King seemed to be dozing. His head drooped upon his breast; his cap, pulled forward over his forehead, hid his eyes. Thus, seated on his high chair of State, which was surmounted by a crown, he seemed, huddled up as he was, like a man who had fallen asleep while engaged in some profound meditation.

At this moment Tristan and his followers crossed the bridge of Sainte-Anne over the canal, about two hundred feet from the entrance to le Plessis.

"Who goes there?" asked the King.

The courtiers, in surprise, looked at each other inquiringly.

"He is dreaming," said Coyctier in a low voice.

"*Pasques-Dieu!*" cried Louis XI. "Do you think I'm a fool? People are now crossing the bridge. To be sure I am sitting near the chimney, and I may hear more clearly than you. This effect of nature might be made useful," he thoughtfully added.

"What a man!" said le Daim.

Louis XI. arose and walked toward one of the windows looking over the town. He saw the grand provost and exclaimed:

"Ha, ha! here come my old crony and his thief. And there, too, is my little Marie de Saint-Vallier; I had forgotten all about that. Olivier," he continued to the barber, "go at once and tell Monsieur de Montbazon to serve us some good Bourgueil wine at dinner, and mind the cook forgets not the lampreys. Madame la Comtesse likes those of all things. May I eat lampreys?" he added after a pause, glaring uneasily at Coyctier.

For all answer the physician commenced to examine his master's face. The two men were a picture.

Historians and romancists have consecrated the brown cam-

let large coat, with breeches of the same material, worn by Louis XI. His cap, decorated with pewter medallions, his collar of the order of Saint-Michael are not less known; but no writer, no painter, has ever depicted the visage of that terrible monarch in his last years; sickly, hollow, yellow, brown, every feature of which was expressive of sour cunning and cold sarcasm. This mask had the brow of a noble man, a forehead furrowed with wrinkles, weighty with deep thoughts; but on his lips and cheeks was a something indescribably low and vulgar. Looking at certain details of that countenance you might have thought him a debauched vine-grower or a miserly tradesman; but then, above these resemblances and the decrepitude of a dying old man, could vaguely be seen the King, the man of power, the man of action, arising supreme. His pale yellow eyes seemed extinct of sight; but a spark of courage and wrath lurked within; at the slightest friction it could burst into flame and cast about consuming fires.

The physician was a stout burgher with a florid face, dressed in black, peremptory, greedy of gain, of much self-importance.

These two personages were framed, so to say, in that paneled chamber of walnut-wood, hung about with tapestry of Flanders; the ceiling was of carved beams and dingy with smoke.

The furniture, the bed, all inlaid with arabesques of polished pewter, would to-day seem more valuable than they were at that time when the arts were just exploiting their numberless masterpieces.

"Lampreys are not good for you," replied the physician.

(This title, *le physicien*, but recently substituted for the former term *maitre myrrhe*, is still applied to the faculty in England. The name was at that time almost universally used in France.)

"What then may I eat?" asked the King humbly.

"Widgeon in salt. Otherwise, you have so much bile moving that you might die on All-Souls' Day."

"To-day!" cried the King, terrified.

"Be composed, Sire," answered Coyctier. "Do not fret your mind; try and amuse yourself some."

"Ah!" said the King, "my daughter Marie used to succeed in that difficult business."

As he spoke, Imbert de Basternay, Sire de Montrésor, and de Bridoré, softly knocked on the royal door. By the King's permission he entered and announced the Comte and Comtesse de Saint-Vallier. Louis nodded a sign. Marie appeared, followed by her aged husband, who had to allow her to precede him.

"Good-day, my children," said the King.

"Sire," replied the lady in a whisper, as she embraced him, "I would speak secretly with you."

Louis made as though he had not heard her.

"Dufou, Holà!" he cried in a hollow voice, turning to the door.

Dufou, Lord of Montbazon, grand cupbearer of France, entered in haste.

"Go to the steward; tell him I must have widgeon salted for dinner. Then to Madame de Beaujeu, inform her that I dine alone to-day. Do you know, madame," continued the King, pretending to some feeling, "that you neglect me. It is nearly three years since I saw you. Come, come hither, pretty one," he added, sitting down and holding out his arms to her. "How thin you have become! Why have you allowed her to get so thin? Eh?" he ejaculated, turning to the Count de Poitiers.

The jealous husband cast so frightened a look at his wife that she almost pitied him.

"It's happiness, Sire," replied he.

"Ah! you love each other too much, do you?" said the King, holding his daughter between his knees. "I was right in calling you Marie-pleine-de-Grace. Coyctier, leave us! Now, what do you want of me?" he asked his daughter, as

soon as he saw the physician was gone. "After sending me your——"

In this so great danger Marie audaciously placed her hand on the King's lips and whispered in his ear:

"I always thought you cautious and quick-witted——"

"Saint-Vallier," said the King, laughing, "I think Bridoré has something he wishes to say to you."

The count left the room; but he made a gesture with his shoulder, well known to his wife, who could guess the thoughts of this jealous man, and realized that she must guard against his malignancy.

"Tell me, child, how you think I am looking? Have I changed much, eh?"

"Do you want the truth, my lord? Or must I only speak you fair?"

"No," said he in a husky tone of voice, "I want to know where I am."

"In that case you look but poorly to-day. I trust, though, that my veracity mars not my cause's success."

"What is your cause?" asked the King, frowning and passing one hand over his forehead.

"Ah! Sire," she replied, "the young man that you have had arrested in the house of your silversmith, Maître Cornélius, and who is now a prisoner to the grand provost, is innocent of theft."

"How know you this?" asked the King.

Marie hung her head and blushed.

"I need not ask if there is love at the bottom of this business," said the King gently, and stroking his chin, while he raised his daughter's face. "If you do not confess every morning, child, you will go to hell."

"Cannot you oblige me without questioning my secret thoughts?"

"Where were the pleasure in that?" exclaimed the King, seeing a chance of some amusement in this affair.

"Ah! but would you have pleasure at the cost of my sorrow?"

"Oh! you sly puss, you; won't you give me your confidence, then?"

"So, then, my lord, set that young noble free."

"Oh, oh! he is a nobleman, is he?" cried the King. "Then he is not an apprentice?"

"He is certainly innocent," said she.

"I do not so see it," replied the King coldly. "I am the supreme judge in my kingdom; it is my duty to punish malefactors."

"Come, put not on that solemn face of yours! Grant to me the life of that young man."

"Would not that be giving back your own?"

"Sire," said she, "I am pure and virtuous. You do but jest——"

"Then," said Louis XI., interrupting her, "if you cannot show me my way, I must get the light of Tristan upon it."

Marie de Sassenage turned pale; she made a violent effort; she said:

"Sire, let me assure you that should you do this, you will afterward regret it. The so-called thief has stolen nothing. If you will but grant me his pardon, I will tell you all, even though you should visit it on me."

"Oh, ho! this is becoming serious," exclaimed the King as he pushed up his cap. "Speak, child."

"Well," said she in a low voice in her father's ear, "he was in my room all night."

"He may have been there and yet robbed Cornélius; a double larceny."

"Sire, I have your blood in my veins—I was not born to love a scoundrel. That young noble is the nephew of the captain-general of your bowmen."

"Well, well!" cried the King, "you are hard to confess."

At these words the King pushed his daughter off his knee, hurried to the door of the room, but softly and on tiptoe, making no sound. A moment ago the light from the window in the outer room, shining in the space beneath the door, had traced the shadow of a listener's foot projected slightly on the floor of his room. He abruptly opened the iron-bound door and surprised the Comte de Saint-Vallier eavesdropping. "*Pasques-Dieu !*" he exclaimed, "such insolence deserves the axe."

"My liege," said Saint-Vallier boldly, "I would rather the axe were at my neck than that the ornament of the married were on my head."

"You may yet have both," said Louis XI. "Not a man of the lot of you is safe from such a misfortune, my lords, all. Go into the outer hall. Conyngham," continued the King, addressing the Scottish captain, "you were asleep, eh? Where, then, is Monsieur de Bridoré? Why do you thus allow me to be invaded? *Pasques-Dieu*, the meanest burgher in Tours is better served than his King."

After venting his anger Louis reëntered the room; but he was careful to draw the tapestry curtains, which formed a second door, intended less for the stoppage of the whistling, harsh winds than for the stifling of the King's words.

"So, my daughter," said he, amusing himself with teasing her as a cat does with a mouse, "Georges de Estouteville was your lover last night?"

"Oh, no, Sire!"

"No? Ah! by Saint-Carpion! he deserves death. Did the villain then not think my daughter fair enough?"

"Oh! that's not the way of it," said she. "He kissed my feet and hands with such ardor as might have melted the most virtuous wife. He loves me truly and in all honor," she added.

"Then do you mistake me for Saint-Louis, that I should believe such nonsense? A young fellow made like he is, to

risk his life just to kiss your little slippers or your sleeve? Tell that to some one else."

"But aye, my lord, it is true! Still he came for another reason."

Having uttered these words, Marie felt that she had endangered her husband's life, for Louis eagerly asked:

"For what?"

The adventure amused him muchly. He certainly did not anticipate the strange confidences his daughter now made him after she had stipulated for her husband's pardon.

"Oh, ho! Monsieur de Saint-Vallier. So you would even dare to shed the royal blood!" cried the King, his eyes blazing with fury.

At this moment the bell of le Plessis rang the hour of dinner and the escort of the King to arms. Leaning on his daughter's arm, Louis XI. appeared with lowering brow on the threshold of his Chamber, and there found his guard in attendance. He glanced ambiguously at the Comte de Saint-Vallier, as he was thinking up the sentence he meant to pronounce on him.

The deep silence which reigned was presently broken by Tristan's footsteps as he ascended the grand stairway. The grand provost entered the hall, and, advancing toward the King, said:

"Sire, the affair is settled."

"What, is it all over?" said the King.

"Our man is in the hands of the monks. He confessed the theft after a screw of the 'question.'"

The countess sighed and turned pale; she was unable to utter a word, she could only gaze at the King. That look was observed by Saint-Vallier, who muttered in an undertone:

"I am betrayed! The thief is acquainted with my wife."

"Silence!" commanded the King. "Some one there is here who tires my patience. At once, and stop the execu-

tion," he added, addressing the grand provost. "Your own body will answer for that of the criminal, my too prompt friend! This affair must be thoroughly sifted, I purpose the doing of it myself. Set the prisoner at large provisionally; I can always recover him; these robbers have hiding-places that they love, lairs where they lurk. Let it be made known to Cornélius that to-night I go to his house to conduct the inquiry. Monsieur de Saint-Vallier," said the King, fixing his eyes on the count, "I know of your doings. All the blood in your body could not pay for one drop of mine; do'st understand? By our Lady of Cléry! You have committed *lèse-majesté*. Did I give you so sweet a wife that you should make her pale and haggard? To your house at once, there make ready preparations for a long journey."

The mere habit of cruelty made the King pause at these words; then he added:

"To-night you set forth to Venice to attend to my business with that government. You need have no anxiety about your wife; she will abide with me at le Plessis; she certainly should be safe here. From this on I shall watch over her with greater care than I have done since I married her to you."

When she heard these words, Marie silently pressed her father's arm as though thanking him for his clemency and good grace. As for Louis XI., he was laughing in his sleeve.

Louis XI. was particularly fond of interfering in the domestic concerns of his subjects, and he was every ready to mingle his royal majesty in bourgeoisie life. This taste, sincerely blamed by some historians, was really but a passion for the *incognito*, one of the greatest relaxations of princes—a kind of temporary abdication, enabling them to put a dash of spice into their existence which becomes insipid for the lack of opposition. Louis XI., however, played his *incognito* without disguise. On such occasions he was always the "good-fellow," endeavoring to please the middle-class whom he thus

made his allies against grim feudality. It was some time now since he had found an opportunity of "making himself popular," or taking up the defense of some person *engarrié*, an old term still surviving in Tours and meaning petty litigation, so that he vehemently entered into the secret sorrows of Maître Cornélius, as also into his anxieties.

Several times during dinner he said to his daughter :

"Who, think you, can have robbed my old crony? His losses from theft now amount to over twelve hundred thousand crowns' worth of jewels, this in eight years. Twelve hundred thousand crowns, my lords!" he went on, looking round at the gentlemen-in-waiting. "By our lady! with such a sum a great many absolutions may be bought at Rome. *Pasques-Dieu*, with such a sum of money I could have built the bank along the Loire, or, still better, have conquered Piedmont; a fine buffer all ready constructed for our kingdom."

When dinner was ended, Louis XI. led away his daughter, the physician, and the grand provost, with an escort of men-at-arms, to the Hôtel de Poitiers, where he found, as he expected, the Comte de Saint-Vallier awaiting his wife, most likely to make away with her.

"Monsieur," said the King, "my instructions were for your immediate departure. Bid farewell to your wife, and at once proceed to the frontier; you will be accompanied by an escort of honor. As to your instructions and credentials, they will be in Venice before yourself."

Louis issued his orders, not forgetting to add certain secret instructions to a lieutenant of the Scottish Guard, to take a squad of men and attend the King's envoy to Venice. Saint-Vallier departed in haste, after giving a cold kiss to his wife, which he would have been pleased had it been fatal to her.

When the countess had retired to her chamber, Louis XI. crossed over to the Malemaison, eager to begin the unraveling of the dismal farce, lasting, as it had done, for eight years, in the house of his silversmith. He flattered himself that being

the King he could exercise enough penetration to discover the mystery of the robberies. Cornélius did not look upon the advent of this numerous retinue without forebodings of woe.

"And are all these people to take part in the inquiry?" he asked the King.

Louis could not refrain from smiling at the evident fright of the old miser and his sister.

"No, crony," said he; "don't worry yourself, they will sup with us at le Plessis; you and I will alone go into the matter. I am so excellent an investigator that I will wager ten thousand crowns with you that I can find the criminal."

"Never mind the wager, Sire; just find him."

They went at once into the strong-room in which the Fleming kept his treasures. There King Louis, who first asked to see the casket whence the Duke of Burgundy's jewels had been abstracted, and then the chimney down which the robber was supposed to have come, easily proved to the silversmith the falseness of the latter supposition, inasmuch as there was no sign of soot upon the hearth—where, of a truth, a fire was but seldom kindled—and no trace of anything having descended the flue. Moreover, that the chimney issued at a portion of the roof that was practically inaccessible.

After two hours of close investigation, marked with that sagacity which distinguished the suspicious nature of Louis XI., it was proved to a demonstration that no one had forced an entrance into the treasury. No marks of violence showed upon the locks, inside or out, nor on the iron coffers used to contain the gold, silver, and jewels hypothecated by wealthy debtors.

"If the thief opened this box," said the King, "why did he take nothing more than the Bavarian jewels? What reason had he for leaving this pearl necklace laying beside them? A queer robber!"

At this remark the wretched miser turned deathly pale; the King and he eyed each other for a moment.

"Then, my liege, for what did that robber come here whom you have taken under your protection? And, also, why was he prowling around at night?"

"If you have not guessed, oh! my crony, I command you to remain in ignorance. That is a secret of my own."

"Then I am haunted of the devil!" cried the usurer lamentably.

Under any other circumstances the King would have laughed at his silversmith's cry; but in place of this he was studious and thoughtful; he was now casting on the Fleming a scrutiny peculiar to men of genius and force, penetrating to the brain. Cornélius was alarmed; he thought he must have, in some way, offended his dangerous master.

"Be it devil or angel, I'll have him, the criminal," the King abruptly exclaimed. "Should you be robbed to-night, to-morrow I will know who did it. Summon that old hag, your sister," he added.

Cornélius slightly hesitated at leaving the King alone in his treasure chamber; but the stern smile that curled Louis' withered lips compelled him. He, nevertheless, hastened to return, followed by the old woman.

"Have you any flour?" demanded the King.

"Oh, yes; we have laid in our winter supply," she answered.

"Well, go and fetch some," said the King.

"What then would you be doing with our flour, Sire?" she exclaimed in alarm, and not impressed in the least by the King's august majesty.

"Old fool! do you as our gracious liege commands," cried Cornélius. "And shall the King lack flour?"

"My good flour!" grumbled she, as she descended the stairs. "Is this for what I buy fine flour?"

Then she returned and said to the King:

"Is it, Sire, only a royal fancy to examine my flour?"

Finally she reappeared, this time carrying one of those coarse flax-sacks, which from time immemorial have been used

in Touraine to fetch and carry provisions to and from the market—nuts, fruit, or grain. The bag was half full of flour. The housewife opened it and showed it to the King, casting a viperous, venomous glance with which old maids, as one may say, seem to squirt venom on a man.

“It costs six sous the *septérée* or measure,” said she.

“What, then, does that matter?” said the King. “Spread it upon the floor, but do it carefully so that it may be evenly strewn—as if it had been a light fall of snow.”

But the old maid comprehended him not. This order dismayed her more than though the end of the world had come.

“My flour, Sire!—on the ground! But—why——”

Maître Cornélius was vaguely beginning to understand the intent of the King’s doings. He grasped the sack and gently spread its contents on the floor. The old woman shuddered, but she extended her hand for the empty bag, and when it was given her by her brother disappeared step by step with a profound sigh.

Cornélius took a feather-duster and carefully smoothed over the flour till it lay like a sheet of snow; as he did this he stepped backward, the King before him, and who seemed much amused over the proceedings. When they reached the door Louis XI. said to Cornélius:

“Are there two keys to the lock?”

“No, Sire.”

The King carefully examined the structure of the door, which was heavy and strengthened with plates of iron and strong bars of the same, all of which latter converged to a secret lock, the key of which Cornélius only possessed.

After scrutinizing everything thoroughly the King sent for Tristan; him he ordered to set a watch at night with the greatest circumspection and secrecy in the mulberry trees on the embankment and on the roofs of the adjoining houses; first, though, to assemble at once the rest of his command and escort him back to le Plessis, so that it might appear that

the King did not stay to sup with Cornélius. Then he told the miser to close his windows with extreme care, so that not a single ray of light might escape through them, and to give orders that he be served with a light repast to continue the deception. Then the King departed in much pomp for le Plessis by way of the embankment, and privately returned with only two of his suite to the house of the *torçonnier*. These precautions were so well taken and carried out that the good folk of Tours and the courtiers really believed that the King had returned to le Plessis, and that he was to sup on the morrow with Maître Cornélius. The miser's sister still further confirmed this by buying some green-sauce from the best maker, who had a store near the *quarroi aux herbes*, afterward known as the *carroi de Beaune*, in honor of a splendid white marble fountain which was sent from Italy as an ornamentation for the capital of his Province by Jacques de Beaune.

About eight o'clock that evening, as the King was supping with his physician, Cornélius, and the captain of the Scottish Guard, conversing jollily and forgetting for the nonce that he was Louis XI., ill and in danger of death, profound silence was without, and all passers, even the cleverest thief, might have taken it that the house was uninhabited by any but its usual inmates.

"I hope," said the King laughing, "that my chum the silversmith may this night be robbed, so shall my curiosity be satisfied. See to it, my lords, that no one leaves his chamber to-morrow morning without my order under pain of condign punishment."

Thereupon all went to bed.

The next morning Louis XI. was the first to leave his chamber, and he at once proceeded to the door of the treasury. He was more than astonished to see, as he went along, the imprint of a large foot along the stairway and corridors of the

house. He carefully avoided these so precious footmarks, but traced them to the door of the miser's closet ; this he found locked and without any sign of violence or fracture. He examined the direction of the steps, but they became gradually fainter and ultimately left not the faintest trace ; it was therefore impossible to discover whither the robber had escaped.

"Ha ! crony," cried the King to Cornélius, "you have been robbed most excellently this time, for sure !"

At these words the old Fleming, terrified out of his senses, hurried out. Louis XI. made him look at the footprints on the pavements, and while again examining himself for the second time, the King by chance observed the old man's slippers and there recognized the shape of the sole of which so many copies were spread before him on the stairs. He said not a word and restrained his laughter, for he remembered the number of innocent men who had been hanged for this.

Cornélius now hurried to his treasures. When he was in the room the King caused him to make a new mark alongside those already there, and he soon proved to him that the thief of his treasure was none other than himself.

"The pearl necklace is missing ! There is sorcery in this," cried Cornélius. "I never left my room."

"We'll soon learn as to that, now," said the King. The evident sincerity of the silversmith quite mystifying him.

He at once summoned the men of the watch and asked :

"Marry, now, what saw you during the night ?"

"Ah, Sire !" said the lieutenant, "a most amazing sight ! Your majesty's silversmith crept down by the side of the wall like a cat ; so lightly withal that he seemed but a spectre."

"I ?" exclaimed Cornélius ; this one word he uttered, then remained silent, and stood stock-still and rigid like a man who has lost all use of his limbs.

"Begone now, all of you," said Louis, addressing the bowmen, "and tell Messieur Conyngham, Coyctier, Bridoré, and

also Tristan to leave their rooms and come here at once to mine. You have incurred the penalty of death," said he to Cornélius, who very happily did not hear him. "You have ten such on your soul!"

Thereupon the King grimly, but noiselessly, laughed, then paused. But as he remarked the strange pallor that overspread the old man's face, he said:

"Be not uneasy; you are more valuable to bleed than to kill. You may escape the fangs of *my* justice in consideration of a good round sum paid into my treasury by you; but, mark you, if you build not at least one chapel to the Virgin, you are more than like to find that things are made hot for you throughout all eternity."

"Twelve hundred and thirty and eighty-seven thousand crowns make thirteen hundred and seventeen thousand crowns," replied Cornélius, absorbed in his calculations. "Thirteen hundred and seventeen thousand crowns hidden—where?"

"He must have buried them in some hiding-place," muttered the King, who began to think the sum as royally magnificent. "That was the lodestone that ever attracted him back to Tours. He smelt his gold."

At this moment entered Coyctier. Noticing the attitude of Maître Cornélius, he scrutinized him keenly, the while Louis XI. narrated the adventure.

"My liege," replied the physician, "there is naught of the supernatural in this. Your silversmith is a sleep-walker. This is the third case I have come across of this so singular malady. If you would amuse yourself by watching him at such times, you might see the old hulks stepping without danger on the verge of the parapet to the roof. In two other cases I have already studied, I could observe a curious connection between the actions of the nocturnal existence and the interests and occupations of daily life in which they were engaged."

"Ah! Maître Coyctier, you are indeed most wise."

"Am I not then your physician?" he insolently retorted.

On hearing this reply, Louis XI. made a slight gesture habitual with him when a good idea struck him—he hastily shoved up his cap.

“At such times,” continued Coyctier, “persons transact their business when asleep. As this friend of ours is fond of hoarding, he has simply carried out his darling hobby. He would most probably have an attack when, during the day, he has felt much alarm for the safety of his treasure.”

“*Pasques-Dieu !* and such a treasure!” exclaimed the King.

“Where is it?” asked Cornélius, who, by a singularity of our nature, heard all the remarks of the King and his physician, while yet practically in a state of torpor, caused by thought and the shock of his misfortune.

“Ah!” cried Coyctier, with a diabolically coarse laugh, “somnambulists never have recollection of their acts when they awake.”

“Leave us,” said the King.

When Louis XI. was alone with Cornélius, he glanced at him and ejaculated a cold chuckle.

“Be it known, Worshipful Master Hoogworst,” said he, bowing ironically low, “all treasure-trove in France is the property of the King.”

“Yes, my liege, all is yours; you are the absolute master of our lives and fortunes; but thus far you have been merciful, and have only taken what you needed.”

“Listen to me, old crony mine; if I assist you in recovering this lost treasure, you can surely, in all confidence and without fear, agree to divide it with me.”

“No, Sire, I will not divide it; I will give it all to you at my death. But what scheme have you for finding it?”

“I myself will watch you when you take your nocturnal walks. You doubtless would fear to intrust any but me.”

“Ah! Sire,” exclaimed Cornélius, flinging himself at the King’s feet, “you are the only man in the kingdom whom I would trust in such service; and I shall try to prove my grati-

tude for your goodness to your so humble servant, by doing my utmost to promote the marriage of the heiress of Burgundy with Monseigneur the Dauphin. She indeed would bring you a noble treasure, not of crown-pieces, to be sure, but of lands which would round off your dominions to their greater glory."

"Pshaw, Dutchman, you think to hoodwink me!" said the King, his brow growing threatening, "or you have hitherto played me false."

"Nay, Sire, can you then doubt my devotion—you the only man I love?"

"Words, words!" retorted the King, turning to face the miser, and looking him in the eye. "You ought not to have waited for this moment to be of use to me. You are selling me your influence—*Pasques-Dieu!* to me—Louis the Eleventh. Are you, then, the master? Am I the servant? I wish to know."

"Ah! Sire," said the old man, "I was but waiting to surprise you most agreeably with the news of arrangements I had made for you in Ghent; I was looking for confirmation of it from Oosterlinck through that apprentice. What has become of him?"

"Enough!" said the King. "This is but a blunder the more. I do not like that persons should interfere, uncalled for, in my affairs. Enough! leave me; I must think it all out."

Maître Cornélius found the agility of youth to fly to the lower rooms where he made sure of finding his sister.

"Ah! Jeanne, dear soul, we have a hoard hidden somewhere in this house; I have put away thirteen hundred thousand crowns in jewels somewhere. I—I—I am the thief."

Jeanne Hoogworst rose from her stool and stood erect as if the seat had been red-hot iron.

The shock was so violent for an old maid, accustomed as she was to reduce herself by voluntary privations and fasts, that she trembled in every limb; horrible pains seized her

back. By degrees her paleness increased, and her face—the wrinkles of which made any change difficult to discover—became quite distorted while her brother told her the malady to which he was a victim, and the perplexing situation in which he was placed.

“King Louis the Eleventh and I,” said he in conclusion, “have just been lying to each other like two miracle-mongers. You see, child, if he watches me, he will learn the secret place of my hidden treasure. Only the King may watch my nightly wanderings. I am not so sure that his conscience, near as he is to death, could withstand the temptation of thirteen hundred and seventeen thousand crowns. We must be beforehand with him; *we* must find this nest and send the treasure to Ghent, and you alone——”

Cornélius stopped suddenly short; he seemed to be weighing the heart of his sovereign, who at twenty-two years of age had dreamed of parricide. When he had made up his mind about Louis XI., he rose abruptly like a man in haste to escape a pressing danger. At this moment his sister, too weak or too strong for such a crisis, fell stark; she was dead.

Maître Cornélius raised her and shook her with violence, saying:

“This is no time for dying. You will have time enough for that later on. Oh! it’s all over. Old hag, she never could do the right thing at the right time.”

He closed her eyes and laid her on the floor. But then the good and noble feelings which lay cumbered over in his heart came back to him, and, almost forgetting his hidden treasure, he pathetically cried:

“Ah! my poor companion, have I really lost you? You who understood me so well! Oh! you were my real treasure. There, there, lies my real treasure! With you goes my peace of mind, my affections—all are gone. If only you had known what good it would have done me for you to have lived two days longer, you would surely have remained alive, if only to

please me, my poor sister. Ah! Jeanne! thirteen hundred thousand crowns! Won't that wake you? No, she is indeed dead!"

Thereupon he sat down and said no more; but two great tears welled in his eyes and rolled down his hollow cheeks; then, with many an ejaculation, he locked up the room and returned to the King. Louis was startled by the expression of grief on the damp features of his old crony.

"What now?" he asked.

"Alas! Sire, misfortunes never come singly. My sister is dead. She's gone below before me," said he, pointing to the floor with a terrible gesture.

"Enough!" cried Louis XI., who disliked any mention of death.

"I make you my heir. I have now nothing for which I care. Here are my keys. Hang me, if such be your good pleasure. Take all; ransack the house; it is full of gold. I give it all up to you——"

"Come, come, old friend," said the King, half moved by the sight of this strange grief, "we shall yet find your treasure some of these fine nights; the sight of such riches will give you a further heart to live. I will come again in the course of the week."

"When it pleaseth you, my liege."

At this answer the King, who had made a few steps toward the door, turned sharply around, and the two men looked at each other with an expression that pen or pencil would vainly try to reproduce.

"Adieu, my crony!" said Louis XI. at last, in a curt voice, pushing up his cap.

"May God and the Virgin keep you in their good graces!" replied the usurer humbly, as he conducted the King to the door.

After so long a friendship the two men found a barrier raised between them, erected of suspicion and gold; though they had

always been as one man on matters of suspicion and gold. But then they knew each other so well, they had so completely the habit, as one might say, of intimacy, that the King could divine from the tone of expression in his voice as he said: "When it pleaseth you, my liege," the repugnance he would henceforth feel when he visited the silversmith, just as the latter recognized a declaration of war in the manner of the King's saying: "Adieu, my crony!"

Thus Louis XI. and his treasurer parted in much doubt as to what their future conduct would be to each other. The monarch, for a truth, knew the secret of the Fleming; but he, on his part, could, by means of his connections, bring about one of the greatest acquisitions that any King of France had ever made; namely, the domains of the house of Burgundy, which were, at that time, the coveted of every European sovereign.

Cornélius' gold and influence could most powerfully aid the negotiations now begun by Desquerdes, the general appointed by Louis XI. to the command of the army then encamped on the Belgian frontiers. The celebrated Marguerite's choice would be guided by the good people of Ghent and the inhabitants about her. Thus these two master-foxes were like two duelists whose arms are paralyzed by some stroke of fate.

Now, whether it was that from that day the King's health began to fail and got steadily worse, or that Cornélius did assist in bringing into France Marguerite of Burgundy—who arrived at Amboise in July, 1438, to be married to the Dauphin to whom she was betrothed in the chapel of the castle—certain it is that the King took no steps toward finding the treasure; further, he levied no tribute on his silversmith, and no trial was held; so the pair remained in a cautious condition of armed neutrality.

Happily for Cornélius, a rumor spread around Tours that his sister was proven to have been the robber; and that she had secretly been put to death by Tristan. Otherwise, and if

the true history had become generally known, the whole town would have arisen as one man and hastened to destroy the Malemaison before the King could have taken means to defend it.

But, though these historical guessings may have had some foundation as regards the inaction of Louis XI., it was not so as to Cornélius Hoogworst. He was not supine. The first few days which succeeded the fatal one the silversmith spent in a ceaseless hurry. Like a carnivorous beast confined in a cage, he went and came, he smelt for gold in every cranny of his domicile; he sounded the walls; he studied the crevices; he besought the trees of the garden, the foundations of the house, the turret roofs, earth and heaven, to give back his treasure. Often he stood motionless for hour upon hour, casting his eyes around on every side, plunging them into space. He essayed the miracles of second-sight and sorcery; he tried to see his riches through space and solids.

One overwhelming thought constantly absorbed him; he was consumed by a single desire that gnawed his vitals; he was more cruelly racked by the everlasting agony of the duel he fought with himself since his passion for gold had turned upon and rent him. It was a species of incomplete suicide, embracing all the pangs of living and dying.

Never was a vice so trapped by itself: a miser who by inadvertence locks himself in his subterranean stronghold that contains his treasure has, like Sardanapalus, the happiness of dying in its midst. But Cornélius, the robber and the robbed in one, knowing neither the secret of the one nor the other, possessed, and yet possessed not, his treasure—a novel, whimsical, but ever-continuing form of torture.

Sometimes, when he forgot himself, he would leave the little gratings of his door open, and then the passers in the street could see the little, weazened old man planted on his two legs in the middle of his untilled garden, absolutely motionless, and looking on any one who stopped to gaze at him with a

fixed, glaring stare, the luridness of which froze them with terror. If by any chance he walked about the streets of Tours, he seemed like a stranger there; he knew not where he was, nor did he know whether the sun or moon shone on him. Oftentimes he would ask his way of those he met, believing himself to be still at Ghent; everywhere he seemed on the hunt for his lost treasure.

The most perennial and the most corporeal of all human ideas—that by which man reproduces himself by creating outside and apart from himself the fictitious being known as Property—that mental demon had its claws of steel perpetually clutching at his miser-soul.

In the midst of this torture, Fear arose, with its accompanying train of sentiments. Two men possessed his secret—the one that he himself knew not. Louis XI. or Coyctier could post their spies to watch his movements when he slept, they might thus discover the unknown gulf into which he had cast his riches, that wealth that he had watered with the life-blood of so many innocent ones: and Remorse stood beside Fear.

To prevent during his lifetime the abduction of his lost riches, during the early days after his disaster, he took every conceivable precaution to avoid sleeping; beside, his commercial relations put him in the way of procuring the most powerful anti-narcotics. His wakeful nights were most terrible, his struggles to keep awake awful—alone with night, silence, Remorse, Fear, with all the thoughts that man, instinctively it may be, has most embodied, in obedience to some moral truth, as yet devoid of certain proof.

At last, this man so powerful, his heart so calloused by politics and commerce, this genius (unknown to history), was doomed to succumb to the horrors of the torture he himself had created. Crazy by some reminiscence more agonizing than any he had as yet resisted, he cut his throat with a razor.

His death was almost exactly coincident with that of Louis

XI.; thus there was nothing to restrain the violence of the mob. The populace, unrestrained, pillaged Malemaison, the Evil House. A tradition exists among the older inhabitants of Touraine that a revenue-farmer, named Bohier, had discovered the old usurer's treasure and used it in building the castle of Chenonceaux, that marvelous mansion which, in spite of the lavish wealth of several kings, and the taste of Diane de Poitiers and her rival Catherine de' Medici, remains unfinished to this day.

Happily for Marie de Sassenage, the Comte de Saint-Vallier died, as we all know, during his embassy to Venice. The family did not become extinct. After the departure of the count the countess gave birth to a son, whose career was famous in the history of France under the reign of King François I. He was saved by his daughter, the celebrated Diane de Poitiers, the illegitimate great-granddaughter of Louis XI., and who became the morganatic wife, the adored mistress of Henry II.; for love and bastardy were hereditary in that noble family.

CHÂTEAU DE SACHÉ, *November and December, 1831.*



GAMBARA.

TRANSLATED BY JNO. RUDD, B. A.

To Monsieur le Marquis de Belloy.

NEW YEAR'S DAY 1831 was throwing around its packets of sugared-almonds; four o'clock was striking; great crowds thronged the Palais-Royal, and the restaurants were filling up. At this time a coupé stopped at the entrance and a young man of noble bearing alighted; a foreigner undoubtedly, or he would not have had as attendant an aristocratic chasseur wearing a plumed hat, neither would the panels have displayed the coat-of-arms, which the heroes of July still sought for the purpose of attack.

Our stranger entered the Palais-Royal and followed the crowd around the wooden galleries, evidently not caring to notice the slow progression he was compelled to make by the sauntering mass of humanity; he seemed born to the noble gait, called in derision the "ambassadors' strut," and yet his dignity had a touch of the theatrical. Although his face was grave and handsome, his hat, under which showed a mass of black, curling hair, tipped the least bit too much over his right ear, belying his gravity with a touch of rakishness. His inattentive, half-closed eyes let fall an occasional contemptuous glance upon the crowd.

"There's a handsome young fellow," said a grisette to another one in her company, as they drew aside to let him pass.

"And right well he knows it, too," responded aloud the companion, who was very plain.

After having made a turn through the arcades, the young man alternately looked at his watch and at the sky; he seemed to be impatient, and at last went into a tobacconist's store,

lit a cigar, and stood for a moment before the mirror to glance over his apparel, which was more ornate than the French law of good taste could tolerate. He pulled down his collar and black velvet vest, over which hung many festoons of those heavy gold chains made in Genoa; then, with one jerk of his left shoulder, he satisfactorily arranged his velvet-lined cloak in graceful folds, and resumed his promenade, paying not the slightest attention to the glances of the inquisitive bourgeois.

When the store windows began to be illuminated and the dusk seemed dark enough, he walked to the open square of the Palais-Royal with an appearance of avoiding recognition; he kept close to the wall as far as the fountain, under cover of the hackney-coaches, to thus reach the entrance of the Rue Froidmanteau, a dirty, dark, and disreputable street—a moral sewer which the police tolerate near the purified precincts of the Palais-Royal, the same as an Italian major-domo allows a negligent servant to leave the sweepings from a suite of rooms in a corner of the staircase.

The young man hesitated. He had something of the air of a middle-class wife in her Sunday best clothes when she fears to cross a gutter swollen by the rain; yet the hour was not ill-chosen in which to indulge some questionable whim. Earlier in the day he might have been detected; later, he might be cut out. To have been tempted by a glance more encouraging than alluring; to have followed a young and pretty woman for an hour, perhaps for a day; to set her on a pedestal in his own mind and giving a thousand flattering excuses for her light conduct; to find one's self believing in a sudden, irresistible affinity; to imagine under the flame of a passing excitement the beginning of a love-adventure at an epoch when romances are written because there no longer exists the slightest trace of romance; to have dreamed of balconies, guitars, stratagems, and bolts and Almaviva's mantle; to have written, in fancy, a poem in honor of this divinity; and, after all this, to stop at the door of a house of ill-fame; to find in the decorum

of his Rosina a reticence enforced by the police, is surely a history, a delusion ; is it not, I ask, an experience of many a man, much as he would desire to deny it ?

Our most natural feelings we confess the least willingly ; chiefest is self-conceit. When the lesson goes no further than the door, a Parisian profits by it or forgets it ; so no great harm is done. With a foreigner, though, this is not so ; he begins to think his Parisian education may cost him altogether too dear.

The saunterer was a noble of Milan, banished his country, where some pranks of liberalism had led the Austrian government to suspect him. The Comte Andrea Marcosini had been welcomed in Paris with that French cordiality always shown to one of a witty, amiable nature and of a high-sounding name, especially so when accompanied by an income of two hundred thousand francs a year and a prepossessing appearance. To such a man exile meant but a pleasure tour ; his property was only sequestered, and his friends took means to let him know that after the course of a year or two he could return to his own country without risk.

After rhyming *crudelli affami* with *i miei tiranni* in a dozen or so sonnets, after also assisting as many of the poorer Italian refugees, Comte Andrea, who for his misfortune was born a poet, thought himself released from patriotic concerns. So since his arrival he had given himself up without discretion to the pleasures of every kind that Paris so kindly offers gratis to everybody who may be rich enough to buy them. His talents and attractive person won him success with many women, whom he collectively loved, as was natural to his age, but among all of which he had, as yet, not selected a particular one. Beside, in him the taste for such pleasures was subordinate to the love of music and poetry, gifts which he had assiduously cultivated since childhood ; he thought success in these realms more difficult of attainment and more glorious than the triumphs of gallantry, since nature had spared him

the difficulties which most other men take a pride in vanquishing.

Of a complex nature, like many another man, he let himself be charmed by the comforts of luxury, without which he could hardly have lived; he held just as tenaciously to the social distinctions rejected by his political creed. Thus his theories as an artist, a thinker, and a poet were often in direct contradiction to his tastes, his feelings, and his habits as an opulent man of rank; but he consoled himself for this seeming inconsistency by recognizing the same traits in many Parisians—men who are Liberals from self-interest and aristocrats by nature.

Hence it was not without some misgivings that he found himself on foot, on December 31st, in a thaw, following at the heels of a woman whose dress betrayed abject poverty—an inveterate, long-accustomed poverty—and who was not one whit handsomer than others to be seen on any evening at the Bouffons, the opera, or in society, and she certainly was not as handsome as Madame de Manerville, with whom he had an assignation that self-same day, and who, most probably, was at that moment awaiting him.

But there was a something in the glance, half-wild, half-tender, rapid yet intense, which that woman's black eyes had furtively shot at him; a world of buried sorrows and stifled delights was there; she blushed so fiercely when, emerging from a store where she had lingered a little while, her eyes met those of Marcosini, who was outside awaiting her return, but her look met that of the count's with equal candor. There were, in short, so many incentives to curiosity that the count, seized by one of those crazy temptations for which no language has a name, not even in that of the orgy, followed in pursuit of the woman exactly as an old Parisian runs a grisette to earth.

As he went along, sometimes before, sometimes in her rear, he examined the details of her person and dress; he tried to

dislodge the absurd and frenzied desire that had taken possession of his brain ; but soon his scrutiny felt a keener pleasure than he had experienced the day before as he stood gazing at the perfect shape of a woman he loved, as she took in her bath. Sometimes the unknown fair, bending her head, would throw on him a glance like that of a kid tethered with its head near the ground ; then, still finding him in pursuit, she hurried on as if to escape him. Nevertheless, when a block caused by carriages or persons crowded together brought Andrea beside her, he saw that she turned away from his gaze without any sign of annoyance. These signals of repressed emotions spurred on the unruly dreams which were running away with him, and he gave them a free rein as far as the Rue Froidmanteau, down which, after many windings, she suddenly disappeared, trusting that her pursuer would thus find the scent killed for him ; he was astonished at this move and had lost trace of her.

It was dark. Two highly rouged women, who were drinking a liqueur of black-currant in a grocery, saw the young woman and called to her. She paused a moment on the threshold, replied to their greeting by a few gentle words and passed on. Andrea, who was close behind her, saw her vanish in one of the darkest courts in the street, of which he knew not the name. The repulsive appearance of the house which the heroine of his romance had entered turned his stomach. He stepped back a few paces to examine the surroundings, when, finding a villainous-looking fellow at his elbow, he asked for information. The man rested one hand on a knotty stick, and ironically answered in two words :

“Droll dog !”

But catching a full view of the Italian, who stood in the light of a street lamp, his face suddenly assumed a wheedling expression.

“Ah ! your excuses, monsieur,” said he, at once changing his tune ; “there’s a restaurant in that house, a kind of *table*.

d'hôte is there served, where the cooking is horribly bad and they put cheese in the soup. Monsieur, perhaps, is in search of that place—for it is easy to see that monsieur is an Italian—and Italians are fond of velvet and cheese. If monsieur would like to know of a better eating-house, I can show him one; my aunt lives near by, and she is very fond of foreigners."

Andrea drew his cloak as high as his nose and rushed out of the street, driven by the disgust he felt for this filthy creature, whose clothing and gestures were in keeping with the squalid house into which the unknown woman had disappeared. He returned with delight to the comforts and elegancies of his suite of rooms, and passed the evening with the Marquise d'Espard, to cleanse himself, if possible, of the pollution of the fancy that had taken such hold upon him.

Nevertheless, afterward when he was in bed, in the silence of the night, his evening vision arose before him, brighter, clearer, more vividly than the reality. Before him walked his divinity; at times as she crossed the street gutters she slightly raised her dress and displayed a shapely leg; and her beautifully mouldered hips swayed at every step. Once more Andrea wished to speak to her and dared not. He, Marcosini, a noble of Milan! Then he saw her once more enter the dark court and the wretched house, and blamed himself for not following her farther.

"For," said he to himself, "if it was that she avoided me and tried to put me off the scent, surely it is a sign of her loving me. With women of this kind coyness is proof of love. Possibly though if I had gone further with the adventure it might have ended in disgust. I'll just sleep in peace."

The count was in the habit of analyzing his keenest sensations, as all men born with a good headpiece involuntarily do when their brain equals their heart; he was greatly surprised to still find himself thinking of the strange damsel, not in the ideal glamour of a vision, but in all the reality of the naked

facts. And yet, if his fancy had stripped her of the misery of wretchedness, the woman herself would have been spoilt for him; for he wanted her, he desired her; he loved her—muddy stockings, broken shoes, her battered straw bonnet, all! He longed for her in that very house which he had seen her enter.

“Am I then enamored of vice?” he asked himself with horror. “Nay, I have not come to that, I am but three-and-twenty; there is nothing of the senile stage about me.”

The very vehemence of the caprice of which he was the plaything seemed to somewhat reassure him. This curious struggle, these reflections, this love on a run may be an enigma to some persons who imagine they know the ways of Paris; but let such bear in mind that Count Andrea Marcosini was not a Frenchman.

Brought up as he was by two pious abbés, by the instruction of a pious father, who had seldom permitted him out of their sight, Andrea had not fallen in love with a cousin at eleven, nor had he seduced his mother’s waiting-maid at twelve; he had not studied at those colleges where the most consummate teaching is not prescribed by the State; he had lived in Paris but a short time, and he was yet on the watch against those sudden and deep impressions against which the education and customs of a French education are such a powerful ægis.

In Southern lands great passions are often born at a glance. A Gascon gentleman who had tempered his sensibility by deep reflection, and owned a horde of little recipes against the sudden apoplexies of the head and heart, had one day advised Marcosini to indulge at least once a month in a wild sensual orgy, so he might avert those storms of the soul which, without such precautions, were apt to burst forth at inconvenient times. Andrea well remembered this advice, and, as he sank to sleep, muttered to himself:

“Well, I’ll begin to-morrow, January the 1st.”

This will explain why it was that the Comte Andrea Marcosini so furtively skirted the line of hackney-coaches to get

at the entrance of the Rue Froidmanteau. The man of fashion hampered the lover; he hesitated for some time, but, after a final appeal to his courage, the lover advanced with a firm step to the house, which he easily recognized. There he again stopped. Was the woman what he took her to be? Might it not be that he was about taking a false step?

Just then he recollected the Italian table-d'hôte, and eagerly jumped at the middle course thus offered, and which seemed like to serve the ends of his desires and his repugnance.

He entered the place, intending to dine there; he made his way down a greasy passage, at the end of which he found, after groping about for some time, the damp and slimy steps of a stairway, and which, to an Italian nobleman, must have seemed little more than a ladder.

Attracted to the second floor by the light of a lamp placed on the floor, and by a strong scent of cooking, he pushed a door which stood ajar, and saw a large room dingy with smoke and grease, where a woman was engaged laying a table for about twenty customers. None of the guests had as yet arrived.

Glancing around the ill-lighted room, where the paper hung in strips from the wall, the nobleman seated himself near a stove which rumbled and smoked in a corner.

The major-domo of the place, attracted by the noise the count made in entering, now hustled into the room. Picture to yourself a thin, lank cook, very tall, blessed with a nose of extravagant dimensions, casting about him from time to time a feverish glance that he intended to seem cautious. At sight of Andrea, whose dress and appearance bespoke affluence, Signor Giardini bowed respectfully.

The count expressed an intention of habitually dining there with his compatriots; he paid for a number of tickets in advance, and gave a friendly tone to the conversation to enable him to achieve his purpose the quicker.

He had scarcely alluded to the woman he was seeking than

Signor Giardini made a grotesque gesture, looked knowingly at his customer with a wink, and let a smile curl his lip.

"*Basta!*" he exclaimed. "*Capisco!* You, signor, are brought hither by two appetites. The Signora Gambara will not have wasted her time if she has managed to interest a gentleman so generous as you seem to be. I can tell you in one word all that we know here of the woman, who is truly to be pitied.

"The husband was born, I think, at Cremona, but he came here from Germany, quite recently. He has been endeavoring to get the *Tedeschi* to try some new music and a new kind of instrument. It is pitiable, eh?" exclaimed Giardini, shrugging his shoulders. "Signor Gambara, who believes himself a great composer, does not seem to me to be particularly smart in other directions. A fine fellow enough, occasionally good-natured, full of commonsense and wit, especially when he has drunk a glass or two of good wine—a not frequent occurrence, for he is frightfully poor. He toils night and day in composing imaginary operas instead of working for a living as he should do. His poor wife is reduced to working for all sorts of people, prostitutes and the like—sewing she does. Well, it can't be helped, she loves her husband like a father and cares for him like a baby.

"Lots of young men have come here to dine in hopes of being able to pay court to madame, but no one has as yet succeeded," he said, with a significant emphasis on the last word. "La Signora Marianna is virtuous, sir; much too virtuous for her own good, worse luck. Nowadays men give nothing for nothing. The poor creature will die in poverty

"You would naturally suppose that her husband would reward such fine devotion, wouldn't you? Bah, he doesn't even give her one smile. The cooking is done at the bakery, for, see you, this devil of a husband never earns a sou, but he spends his whole time in making instruments, which he cuts and lengthens, and shortens and fits, and sets up and takes to

pieces again till they give out squeaks that would scare a cat ; then only is he happy. And yet you will find him the kindest and gentlest of men ; he's not a bit lazy, no indeed, he's always busy. To speak truth, he's mad and doesn't know it. I have seen monsieur filing and forging those instruments of his and chewing away on his black bread with an appetite that I have often envied—I, monsieur, who keep the best table in Paris.

“Your excellenza shall learn before an hour passes over your head the man I am. I have introduced a number of refinements into Italian cookery that will amaze you. Excellenza, I am Neapolitan, which is saying, a born cook. But of what good is instinct without science? Science! I have spent thirty years in acquiring it. See, then, to what it has brought me! My history is that of every man of talent. My efforts, my experiments, have ruined three restaurants in succession—one at Naples, the others at Parma and Rome. Again reduced in this city to making a trade of my art, I practice in my ruling passion more than before. Some of my finest ragouts I give to these poor refugees. I ruin myself. Folly! you would say? I know this, but, then, can I help myself? Genius is stronger than I; is it possible I can restrain myself from creating a dish that smilingly allures me? And they always know it, the scallawags! I can make oath to you that they know at once whether it was my wife or I who handled the ladles.

“And what now is the consequence? Out of the sixty or more guests whom I used to see at my table-d'hôte every day when I first opened this wretched place, barely twenty remain, and most of these want credit.

“The Piedmontese, the Savoyards, have quit me, but the persons of taste, the Italians proper, remain. And for these what sacrifices would I not make! I often give them a dinner at five-and-twenty sous a head that has cost me double that to prepare.”

Signor Giardini's little speech was so redolent of Neapolitan cunning that the count was tickled immensely; he could have fancied himself back at Gerolamo's.

"If such be the case, my good host," said he familiarly to the chef, "and since accident, chance, and your good-nature have let me into the secrets of your daily sacrifices, permit me the honor of paying double."

Thus speaking, Andrea flung a forty-franc piece on the table, out of which Signor Giardini solemnly returned him two francs and fifty centimes in change, with a mysterious ceremony which enchanted the young man.

"In a few minutes," continued the signor, "you shall behold your *donnina*. I'll seat you next the husband; if you wish to get in his good graces, talk music; I have invited both of them for this evening, poor souls. For New Year's Day celebration I have prepared a dish for my guests in which I may say that I have surpassed myself."

The words of Signor Giardini were drowned in the noisy greetings of the said company, who streamed in singly or in pairs, irregularly, after the manner of tables-d'hôte. Giardini stood ostentatiously by the count and pointed out to him the regular company. He was liberal with his quips and quirks, and tried by his humorous remarks to bring a smile to the lips of this man whom, as his Neapolitan instinct assured him, was a wealthy patron who might be turned to account.

"That man," said he, "is a poor composer who would much like to leave the ballad line for the realm of opera; but he can't. He abuses managers, music publishers, everybody but himself, who is his own greatest enemy. Don't you catch on to his rufescent complexion, what jolly self-conceit, how little firmness he displays? He's only cut out for a ballad-monger, and nothing else. The other man in his company, who looks like a match-vendor, is a great musical celebrity, Gigelmi—the greatest of Italian conductors. But he is now going deaf, and is ending his days most miserably, deprived

as he is of all that is attractive to him. Ah! and here comes our Ottoboni the great, the most guileless old fellow on earth; and yet he is suspected of being the most vindictive of all those who are plotting for the regeneration of Italy. I should dearly like to know why ever they banished such a mild old gentleman——”

Here Giardini looked closely at the count, who, aware that he was being pumped on the political question, kept an impassibility that was truly Italian.

“A man who cooks for all the world is denied political opinions, *eccellenza*,” went on this culinary genius. “But any one seeing that worthy man, who looks more the lamb than the lion, would say as I do about him, even to the Austrian ambassador himself. Beside all, at this day liberty is no longer proscribed; it is *en route* again! At least that’s what these good people here present fancy,” he whispered in the count’s ear, “and I, why should I daunt their hopes? Though I myself do not hate an absolute government.

“All great talent is for absolutism. Well, though Ottoboni is choke full of genius, he expends time and trouble in teaching Italy; he writes little books to teach the minds of children and the laboring classes, and he very cleverly gets them smuggled into Italy; he adopts every means to awaken a moral sense in our unlucky native land, where, after all, enjoyment is more desired than liberty—it may be they are right.”

The count still retained his impassiveness, and the cook was unable to learn any of his political opinions.

“Ottoboni,” he went on, “is a saint; very benevolent and helpful; all the refugees love him, for you must know, *eccellenza*, that even a Liberal may have his virtues. Ah! here we have a journalist!” he exclaimed, interrupting himself, and pointing out a man who wore the attire generally attributed, perhaps more conventionally than truthfully, to the garret poet; his coat was threadbare, his shoes cracked, his hat shiny, his overcoat in senile decay. “*Eccellenza*, that poor man is

full of talent and incorruptibly honest ! He was born in a wrong age ; he tells the truth to the whole world ; people detest him. He is the theatrical critic of two little journals, though he is smart enough to write for the great dailies. Poor fellow !

“ The others are beneath your notice ; your excellency will easily learn about them without my help,” he hastily added, perceiving that the count was no longer paying attention to him, as the wife of the composer entered the room.

Seeing Andrea there, Signora Marianna visibly started and a blush tinged her cheeks.

“ Here he is,” said Giardini in an undertone, pressing the count’s arm and motioning to a man of tall stature. “ See how pale and grave he is, poor man ! His hobby is evidently not cantering to his mind to-day.”

Andrea’s love-dream of Marianna was suddenly overpowered by the captivating grace which Gambara’s presence exercised over every true lover of art. The composer was forty ; but although his high forehead, from which the hair had flown, was furrowed with a few wrinkles, not deep, but in parallel lines, and in spite of the hollow temples where the blue veins showed through the clear, transparent skin, and of the sunken orbits of his dark eyes surmounted by heavy lids and light-colored lashes, the lower part of his face made him still appear young, so calm were the lips, so tranquil the outline. It could be recognized at a glance that this man had subserved passion by the curb of intellect ; that he would only grow old from mental struggle.

Andrea stole a rapid glance at Marianna, who was watching him. The sight of her glorious Italian head, the exquisite proportion and rich coloring, revealed an organization where all the human forces were symmetrically balanced ; he sounded the gulf which separated this pair accidentally joined together. More than pleased with this evidence of dissimilarity between husband and wife, he no longer combated the feelings which

drew him to Marianna. But for the man whose only blessing she was, he already felt a touch of respectful pity, seeing, as he could not help doing, the dignified and serene acceptance of ill-fortune that was expressed in Gambara's melancholy and mild eyes.

Expecting to find, from Giardini's description, one of those grotesque beings so often set before us by German novelists and libretto poets, instead he found, to his great astonishment, a simple, reserved man, whose manner and demeanor were aught but eccentric, and possessed a dignity all their own. The dress of the musician, though it showed no trace whatever of luxury, was more seemly than his extreme poverty would lead one to expect, while his linen bore testimony to the tender care which watched over even the minor details of his being.

Andrea raised his moistened eyes to Marianna, who did not blush, though a half-smile curled her lips, perhaps called forth by the pride she felt in the young man's mute homage. Too seriously fascinated not to watch for the slightest indication that his feelings were returned, the count began to fancy himself beloved by her because he saw that she comprehended him. From this moment he set himself to the conquest of the husband rather than of the wife, directing all his batteries against poor Gambara, who unsuspectingly went on eating the *bocconi* of Signor Giardini without knowing their taste.

The count opened the conversation with some general remark; but from the first he was conscious that the man's intellect, supposedly blind on one point at least, was extraordinarily clear-sighted on all others, and he saw that it would be far more important to understand his ideas than to attempt any flattery of his whims.

The remainder of the guests, a hungry crew, whose wits were only sharpened by the sight of a dinner, were it good or bad, betrayed a positive animosity to Gambara, and only waited the end of the first course to give vent to their satire.

One refugee, whose frequent leers showed an ambitious scheme in connection with Marianna, and who seemed to fancy that he could entrench himself in her good graces by making her husband ridiculous, opened fire by trying to explain to Marcossini the lay of the land of the table-d'hôte.

"It is quite a long time since we have heard anything about the opera of 'Mahomet,'" he exclaimed, smiling at Marianna. "Can it be that Paolo Gambara is wholly given up to domestic affairs, the charms of the *pot-au-feu*,* and so neglects his super-human genius, thus allowing his talent to grow cold and his imagination to stale?"

Gambara knew all the company; he felt that he lived in a sphere high above them; he therefore no longer took the trouble to repel their attacks, he made no answer.

"It is not given to everybody," said the journalist, "to have an intellect that can comprehend the musical efforts of Monsieur Gambara; it is for this reason, doubtless, that our divine *maestro* hesitates to produce his works for the worthy Parisians."

"And yet," put in the ballad-monger, who up to now had only opened his mouth to cram into it all the food that was within reach, "I know some men of talent who think much of the judgment of these same Parisians. I myself have something of a reputation as a musician," he added diffidently; "I owe it solely to my little songs in vaudevilles, and the great success of my quadrille music in drawing-rooms; but I propose to very soon present to the world a mass composed for the anniversary of the death of Beethoven, and I anticipate a better understanding in Paris than elsewhere. You, monsieur, may perhaps do me the honor of hearing it?" he said, addressing Andrea.

"Thank you," replied the count, "I am afraid that I am not endowed with an understanding necessary for the appreciation of French music. But if you were dead, monsieur, and Bee-

*. The stock-pot; really meaning the chimney-corner.

thoven had written your mass, I should have pleasure in attending the performance."

This retort effectually stopped the skirmishing of the enemy, who wanted to start Gambara off on his hobby-horse so that his gambols might furnish amusement to the new guest. Already it was repugnant to Andrea's feelings to see a madness so gentle and pathetic, if madness it were, at the mercy of this vulgar wit. It was not then with any baseness that he carried on a desultory conversation, in the course of which Giardini's nose not infrequently interposed between two replies. When Gambara gave expression to a paradoxical idea, the cook would poke his head forward, to glance pityingly on the composer, and to wink knowingly at the count as he whispered in his ear:

"E matto!"

Presently, though the second course demanded the attention of the chef, and as he attached extreme importance to this, he was interrupted in his sapient remarks. During his absence, which was only a short one, Gambara leaned toward Andrea and said in his ear:

"Our worthy host threatens us to-day with a dish of his own concoction, which I would advise your avoiding, though his wife has had her eye upon him. The honest fellow has a mania for innovations in cookery. He has ruined himself by experimenting; the last one compelled him to flee from Rome without a passport, a thing he never talks about. After buying the good-will of a famous restaurant, he was engaged to cater for a banquet given by a lately created cardinal, whose household was in an incomplete state. Giardini thought the time had come for him to distinguish himself; he succeeded. That very evening he was accused of trying to poison the whole conclave and was forced to leave Rome, and Italy, without packing his trunk. That misfortune was the last straw, and now——" and Gambara laid his forefinger on his forehead and shook his head.

"In other respects," he added, "he is a right good fellow. My wife can inform you that we are under numerous obligations to him."

And now came in Giardini, carefully carrying a dish, which, with much elaboration, he laid upon the centre of the table; then he modestly resumed his seat by Andrea, who was first helped. When the count took just one taste of the mess, he felt that an immeasurable abyss separated him from the next mouthful. He was much embarrassed, and, being anxious to avoid annoying the cook, he kept his eye upon him and studied. Though a French restaurateur may trouble himself but little about what his guests may think of his cooking, for which they must needs pay anyhow, it is otherwise with an Italian *trattore*, who is scarcely satisfied with perfunctory praise.

To gain time, Andrea paid extravagant compliments to Giardini; he leaned over to whisper in his ear, and as he did this slipped into his hand a gold-piece, begging him to go out and himself purchase some champagne, giving him the freedom to announce to the company that it was his own treat.

When, after a while, the cook reappeared, every plate was cleared, and the room reëchoed with praises for the master-cook. Under the influence of the champagne the Italian tongues were soon unlimbered, and the conversation, till now more or less subdued in the stranger's presence, leaped the barriers of suspicious reserve, and wandered wildly hither and thither over the broad fields of political and artistic theories. Andrea, who was guiltless of all intoxicants but love and poetry, soon controlled the attention of the company, and cleverly led the discussion to matters musical.

"Monsieur will, perhaps, kindly inform me," he said to the composer of dance-music, "how it is that the Napoleon of petty tunes can bemean himself to a struggle with such people as Palestrina,* Pergolese, and Mozart—poor creatures,

* Much of this composer's music is still popular in the United States.

who must go, bag and baggage, on the advent of this stupendous mass for the dead?"

"You see, monsieur," replied the composer, "a musician finds it difficult to reply when his answer needs the coöperation of a hundred skilled performers. Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven, without an orchestra, would have been no great shakes."

"No great shakes!" cried the count. "Why, man, the whole world knows that the immortal composer of 'Don Giovanni' and the 'Requiem' was named Mozart; but I am so unhappy as to be in ignorance by what name the inventor of fashionable country dances is known——"

"Music is a being independent of its execution," said the ex-conductor of orchestras, who, despite his deafness, had caught a few words of the conversation. "Take the C-minor symphony by Beethoven, the musical mind is borne onward into Fancy's realm on the golden wings of the theme in G-natural, repeated by the cornets in E. He sees a whole nature illuminated in turn by dazzling jets of light darkened by clouds of melancholy, inspirited by heavenly strains."

"Beethoven is outclassed by the new school," said the ballad-monger scornfully.

"Beethoven is not yet understood," said the count. "How, then, can he be excelled?"

Here Gambara drank a large glass of champagne, accompanying his libation with a covert glance of approval.

"Beethoven," the count went on, "has extended the limits of instrumentation, and, as yet, none have followed in his path."

Gambara assented with a slight nod.

"His works are specially remarkable for simplicity of construction and for the manner in which the theme is worked out," continued the count. "In the works of most composers the instrumentation is vague and at random, an incoherent blending for a specious effect; they do not carry forward

the progression of the harmony in the movement by any regularity and system. Whereas, Beethoven assigns to each part its tone-quality from the inchoation. The same as various regiments assist by disciplined movements in the winning of a battle, so do the various orchestral scores of a symphony by Beethoven over the general command for the interest of the whole, and are subordinate to an admirably conceived plan.

"In this respect he may be likened to another genius. We often find in Walter Scott's noble historical romances that the personage who appears to have less to do with the action of the story than any other character is, at the proper moment, brought forward, and leads up to the climax by threads woven into the plot."

"*E vero!*" said Gambara, whose commonsense seemed to return inversely to his sobriety.

Being anxious to test the musician still further, Andrea for the nonce abandoned his own predilections and proceeded to attack Rossini's European reputation. He disputed the position which the Italian school had captured by storm, night after night for thirty years on a hundred stages. He soon found he had enough on his hands. At his first words a strong murmur of disapproval arose; but neither interruptions nor exclamations, nor frowns, nor contemptuous looks were now able to check this determined advocate of Beethoven.

"Compare," said he, "the productions of the sublime composer with what is by common consent called the Italian school; what a paucity of ideas, what a limp in the style! Listen to those monotonous measures, those trite cadences, the endless bravura passages flung out haphazard irrespective of the dramatic situation, the ever-recurring *crescendo* brought into vogue by Rossini, and which is now become an essential in musical composition, and, last of all, those trills, vocal fireworks, all combined in a chattering, pattering, vaporous music, the sole merit of which consists in the fluency of the singer and his agility in vocalization.

“The Italian school has lost sight of art’s highest mission. Instead of elevating the world, it has condescended to the crowd; its fame is won by seeking the suffrages of the multitude, and by appealing to the perverted taste of the majority. Its fame is a street-corner celebrity.

“To say all, the compositions of Rossini, in which this music is embodied, as well as of those writers who derive more or less of their style from him, seem to me to be worthy only of collecting a street crowd around a barrel-organ or keeping step to the capers of a punch-and-judy show. I prefer French music even to that; I can’t say more. Long live German music!” he cried, “—— when it is tuneful,” he muttered ironically to himself.

This sally was the summing up of a long argument in which Andrea soared metaphysically with all the ease of a somnambulist on a roof. Gambara, keenly interested in such subtleties, had not missed a word of the argument. At the instant that Andrea dropped it he took it up, and the attention of the company was at once arrested; a few who were about leaving the room returned to listen.

“You attack the Italian school most vehemently,” said Gambara, who was warmed to his work by the champagne he had supped, “but that to me is a matter of indifference. Thank God, I stand outside all these frivolities of melodious frippery. Yet for a man of the world you show but little gratitude to the land from which Germany and France derived their first lessons. While the compositions of Carissimi, Cavalli, Scarlatti, Rossi, were being played through all Italy, the violinists of the French opera enjoyed the singular privilege of being allowed to play their instruments with gloved hands. Lulli, who so much extended the realm of harmony, and who first gave the rule of discords, on arriving in France found only two men, a cook and a mason, who had voice and intelligence enough to execute his music; of the first he made a tenor, and the latter he made a bass. At that time Germans,

always excepting Sebastian Bach, were ignorant of music. But, monsieur," added Gambara, in the humble tone of a man who realizes that his remarks will be received with scorn, if not ill-will, "you must, although young, have studied the higher questions of musical art for a long time, or you could not so clearly explain them."

These words caused a smile in many of the hearers, for they had not understood the fine distinction of Andrea's views. Giardini, convinced that the count was only talking at random, nudged him warily, laughing in his sleeve at the hoax in which he thought himself an accomplice.

"There is much that strikes me as being very true in what you have said," Gambara went on; "but take care. Your argument, while it brands Italian sensualism, seems to incline somewhat to German idealism, which is a not less fatal error. If men of imagination and good taste, like yourself, desert one field only to stray into the other, if they cannot remain neutral between two extremes, we shall always be subject to the satire of the sophists who deny progress and liken human genius to—to this table-cloth, which, being too short to wholly cover Signor Giardini's table, decks one end at the expense of the other."

Giardini bounded in his chair as though he had been stung by a gad-fly, but quick reflection restored his dignity as a host; he raised his eyes to heaven and again poked the count, who was beginning to think the cook more crazy than Gambara.

The serious and even religious manner in which the latter spoke of art interested Marcosini extremely. Seated between these two manias, one so noble, the other so vulgar, and making game of both, to the great amusement of the crowd, the count felt as if he was continually being tossed about from the sublime to the ridiculous—the two extravaganzas of the comedy of human life. Suddenly breaking the chain of the fantastic events which had led him to this smoky den, he fan-

ced himself the victim of some strange hallucination, and began to believe that Gambara and Giardini were two abstractions.

Presently, after a last piece of buffoonery on the part of the deaf orchestra leader, directed at Gambara, the company retired amid roars of laughter; Giardini went off to make coffee he intended offering his guests remaining and his distinguished patron; and his wife meanwhile cleared the table. The count was seated near the stove and between Marianna and Gambara, and in the precise position that the latter had declared to be so desirable—midway between sensualism on the one hand and idealism on the other. Gambara, who for the first time met a man who did not laugh at him to his face, soon left off generalizing and began to speak of himself, his life, his toil, and his hopes of a final musical redemption of which he believed himself to be the Messiah.

"Heatken to me," said he, "ye that have thus far not laughed me to scorn; I will tell you my life—not that I may extol a constancy which does not emanate from my own self, but for the glory of One who has placed this force in my soul. You seem to be good and reverent; if you cannot believe in me, you at least can extend me your sympathy; pity comes of man, faith is God."

Andrea, who blushed crimson, turned and withdrew his foot which had been seeking Marianna's, and fixed his gaze upon her while he listened to her husband.

"I was born at Cremona," continued Gambara, "the son of an instrument-maker; a fairly good performer of music, but a far better composer. I had thus at an early age mastered the laws of composition in its dual aspect, the spiritual and material; and, with the natural curiosity of my age, I paid attention to many things which I afterward applied in my more mature manhood.

"The French invasion drove us, my father and myself, from our home. We were ruined by the war. From the age of ten

I began that wandering life to which all men are condemned who revolve in their brain reforms in art, science, or politics. Fate, or the natural instincts of their minds, which never gee with those of ordinary comprehension, leads them onward, providentially, to points where they receive instruction. Led by my passion for music I wandered through Italy from theatre to theatre, living on little, as men can live there. Sometime I played the violoncello in orchestras; often I formed one of the chorus; or worked in the wings with the carpenters. Thus I studied music in its every aspect, learned the tones of the human voice and instruments, in what manner they differed from each other; I listened carefully to the scores and noted the harmonizing, always applying the rules taught by my father. Often, again, I traveled through the country mending instruments. It was a hard life in a land where the sun ever shines, where art permeates the air and money is not—at least for the artist, since Rome is no longer, save in name only, the sovereign of the Christian world.

“Sometimes I was gladly welcomed, at times driven forth because of my poverty; yet I never lost heart; I heard an inner voice foretelling fame. Music to me seemed but in its infancy. That opinion is still retained.

“All that we still have of the musical efforts anterior to the seventeenth century demonstrates to me that ancient composers knew melody only; they were ignorant of harmony and its vast resources. Music is both science and art. It is rooted in physics and mathematics, hence a science; its inspiration makes it an art, unconsciously employing the propositions of science. It derives from the physical by the very essence of the matter on which it subsists. Sound is air in motion; air is made up of elements which undoubtedly find within us analogous constituents which respond to them, which sympathize with and augment them by the power of the intellect. Thus air must contain as many varieties of elastic molecules, capable of vibrating in as many diverse periods as there are tones in

all sonorous bodies ; and these particles, put in motion by the musician and received by the ear, respond to our ideas in accord with our several organizations. It is my opinion that the nature of sound is identical with that of light. Sound is light under a different form ; both act by vibrations which are sentient to man, and which he transforms in his nerve-centres into ideas.

“ Music is analogous to painting, making use of materials that possess the property of freeing this or that property of the birth substance in suggesting a picture. So in music the instruments perform this part, as does color in the painting. Now, as all sound produced by a reverberating body is invariably accompanied by its major third and fifth, whereby it acts on grains of sand spread upon a plain of stretched parchment and arranges them in geometrical figures—always the same in form according to the pitch—regular when the harmony is a true chord, but without definiteness under the influence of discords, I say that music is an art conceived in Nature’s very womb.”

Gambara’s calm eyes were fixed upon Marcosini, who listened with rapt attention.

“ It is that music is subject to both physical and mathematical laws,” he went on. “ The physical laws are but little understood, the mathematical laws are somewhat more fully comprehended ; and, since their relationship has been more studied, it has enabled those creations of harmony to be effected which we owe to the genius of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and Rossini, men of glorious genius, whose music is unquestionably nearer perfection than that of their predecessors, for it must be admitted that the latter’s genius is incontestable. The old masters could create melody, but they had none of the resources of art and science at command—that noble alliance which blends into a grand whole the beauties of melody and the power of harmony.

“ Now, if a knowledge of the mathematical laws of music

gave these four musicians to us, to what height may we not attain if we can succeed in discovering the physical laws by virtue of which (please note this) we may store up in a greater or less quantity, according to the proportions required, a certain ethereal substance diffused in the air, which gives us music as it gives us light, the phenomena of vegetation and animal life! Do you grasp my meaning?

"These new laws would arm the composer with new powers; it would supply him with instruments superior to those now used, and, more than possibly, with a potency of harmony than that which dictates the realm of music at this time. If every modulation obeys a power, we must need learn that power that we may be enabled to couple these forces in accordance with their appropriate laws. Just now composers are working on substances unknown to them.

"Why should an instrument of metal and one of wood, say a bassoon and a cornet, have so little resemblance of tone, though they act on the same matter, in the same manner, on the constituent gases of the atmosphere? Their dissimilarities must come either from some decomposition of these gases or by the assimilation of affinities, whence they return modified by the influence of some force unknown to us. Could we only discover what those faculties are, then science and art would be immense gainers. Whatever extends science enhances art.

"Well!" he exclaimed, after a short pause, "as to these discoveries! I have traced, I have made them! Yes," said Gambara, with more and more vehemence, "up to now man has noted the effect less than the cause. If he could but penetrate cause, music would be the greatest of the arts. Is it not the one that drives deepest in the soul? In painting you see no more than the picture shows; in poetry you hear only what the poet speaks; music goes far beyond this—it forms thought, it rouses torpid memory. Take a thousand souls present at a concert; a strain speeds forth from Pasta's

throat, executing so masterly the thoughts that shone in Rossini's soul as he wrote the passage; that single phrase of the master, transmitted to attentive souls, develops in them as many diverse poems. To one it shows a woman long dreamed of and desired; to another some shore anon he traversed, where rising before him are the drooping willows, its clear waters, and the hopes that danced with him beneath the leafy coverts. This woman is recalled to the throng of feelings that tortured her in an hour of jealous rage; another one sees the unsatisfied longings of her heart, which is painted by her mind in the rich hues of a dream, the ideal lover to whom she would fain abandon herself with the rapture of the woman in the Roman mosaic, who is seen embracing a chimera; yet another dreams of desires about to be gratified, she plunges in anticipation into a torrent of delight whose raging waves of feeling surge about and break upon her burning bosom. Music alone has power to make us return unto ourselves; all other arts give but limited pleasures. But I am digressing.

“Such, then, were my first ideas, vague it may be, for an inventor in his inception only catches a faint glimpse of the dawn. I kept these glorious ideas at the bottom of my knapsack; they gave me spirit to eat the dry crusts as I gayly soaked them in the waters of a spring. I worked, I composed airs, and after I had played them on some instrument, the first one to hand, I resumed my travels through Italy. At last, when I was two-and-twenty, I settled in Venice, where for the first time I enjoyed rest and gained a fair competence. There I made the acquaintance of a Venetian nobleman, who was taken with my ideas; he encouraged me in my investigations and procured me employment at the Fenice theatre. In Venice living is cheap and lodgings cost but little. I had a room in the Palazzo Capello whence the celebrated Bianca issued one night to become the Grand Duchess of Tuscany and Queen of Cyprus.

"And there I would dream that at some future time my hidden fame would issue thence to be like her, crowned.

"My evenings were spent at the theatre, my days in work. But disaster came. The representation of an opera, 'The Martyrs,' in which I had experimented with my music, was a failure. No one could understand my score. Place Beethoven before the Italians and they cannot gauge him. No one had the patience to await an effect to be produced by the different *motifs* given out by each instrument, all intended to at last unite in one grand harmony.

"I had founded my hopes on the success of the 'Martiri,' for we ever discount success, we disciples of the azure goddess—Hope. When a man thinks himself destined to produce great thoughts, it becomes difficult to believe that they are not achieved; the cask has chinks through which the light will shine.

"In the same palace resided my wife's family; and the hope of winning Marianna, who frequently smiled on me from her window, had greatly stimulated my efforts.

"I now fell into a state of dark melancholy, as I sounded the depths of the abyss into which I had fallen; for before me I saw naught but a life of poverty—a ceaseless struggle in which love must perish.

"Marianna acted as genius does; she bounded over every obstacle, both feet at once. I will not speak of the slender happiness which gilded the early days of my misfortunes. Dismayed by my failure, I felt that Italy was but dull of comprehension and too much under the influence of the routine chorus to be prepared to receive the innovations I meditated; so I turned my thoughts to Germany.

"As I traveled to that country, which I did by way of Hungary, I paid heed to the manifold voices of nature; I tried to reproduce those sublime harmonies by the assistance of instruments which I wholly constructed or changed for the purpose. These experiments necessitated enormous outlay,

and soon exhausted our slender savings. And still this was the happiest time of our lives ; I was appreciated in Germany. Never was my life so glorious as then. I know of nothing to compare with the tumultuous joys that filled me in Marianna's presence, whose beauty was then in all its celestial radiancy and power. I was happy.

"More than once during these hours of weakness I expressed my passion in the language of terrestrial harmony. I even composed some of those melodies which resemble geometrical figures, which are so much prized in the world in which we live. But so soon as I gained success, insurmountable obstacles were placed in my path by rivals, envious or unappreciative.

"I had heard of France as a country which welcomed innovations ; thither I resolved to go ; my wife provided the means and we came to Paris.

"Before this no one had ever actually laughed in my face ; but in this dreadful city I had to undergo this new form of torture, to which was added the keen anguish of miserable poverty. Compelled to sojourn in this fever-stricken quarter, for many months we have lived on Marianna's work ; she does sewing for the wretched prostitutes who make this horrid street their stamping ground. Marianna tells me that she is treated with deference and generosity, which I, for my part, ascribe to the ascendancy of a so pure virtue that even vice itself must needs respect it."

"Hope on," said Andrea. "Perhaps you have reached the end of your trials. My efforts shall be united to yours, and it may be that your labors will yet be seen in their true light ; permit me, in the meanwhile, as a compatriot and an artist like yourself, to offer you in advance some part, however small, of your inevitable future gains."

"All that has to do with my material life is my wife's affair alone," replied Gambara. "She it is who must decide whether without humiliation we can accept the assistance of an honor-

able man, as you seem to be. For myself, who have been led to make you this long-drawn confidence, I must beg your permission to retire. A melody beckons me ; it starts dancingly before me ; bare, quivering, like a beautiful girl entreating her lover for the clothes he has hidden. Adieu, I go to dress my mistress. My wife I leave with you."

He hastened away like a man who blames himself for losing valuable time, and Marianna, somewhat embarrassed, prepared to follow him.

Andrea dared not detain her.

Giardini however came to the rescue.

"But, signorina," said he, "did not you hear your husband tell you to settle some business with the signor count?"

Marianna resumed her seat, but without looking at Andrea, who hesitated about addressing her.

"And will not Signor Gambara's confidence," he at length said, in a voice of emotion, "also win for me that of his wife's? Will *la bella* Marianna refuse to give me the history of her life?"

"My life?" answered Marianna; "my life, it is that of the ivy. If you would ask the story of my heart, you must suppose me equally devoid of pride and modesty after listening to what you have just heard."

"Of whom then shall I ask it?" cried the count, whose passion was blinding his wit.

"Of yourself!" replied Marianna. "You have either understood me, or you never will. Ask yourself."

"I will, but you must listen to me. I take your hand, it is to lay in mine so long as I tell your story truthfully."

"I listen," said Marianna.

"The life of a woman begins with her first passion," said Andrea. "And my dear Marianna began to live only on the day when she first saw Paolo Gambara. Her nature needed a deep passion to afford it joy; more than all she needed some pathetic feebleness to sustain and protect. The lovely female

nature with which she is endowed is perhaps less amenable to passion than maternity.

“ You sigh, Marianna ; have I then laid a finger on an open wound ? You took upon yourself a noble part, young as you were, in protecting a noble, distraught intellect. You said to yourself : ‘ Paolo shall be my genius, I will be his common-sense ; between us we shall almost be that well-nigh divine being that men term angel ; that sublime creature which enjoys and comprehends, while reason never stifles love.’

“ In the first transports of youth, you heard the thousand voices of nature which your poet longed to reproduce. Enthusiasm seized your soul when Paolo spread before you those treasures of poetry as he vainly searched for their equivalent, striving to embody them in the sublime but limited language of his art. You admired him as an ecstatic rapture carried him high above you, for you loved to think that all this errant energy would finally fall and alight upon you as love. You did not realize the tyrannous and jealous empire which thought maintains over the minds of those who are subject to it. Gambara before he knew you was the slave of that proud, vindictive mistress with whom you have been combating against for him to this day. Once, for an instant, happiness was opened before you.

“ Paolo, fallen from the lofty sphere where his mind was ever soaring, was amazed to find a reality so sweet ; so sweet that you may well have believed that his mania would forever slumber in your arms. But ere long music clutched her prey. The dazzling vision which carried you suddenly into the thrilling delights of mutual passion made the solitary path on which you had started look only the more arid and desolate.

“ In the story just narrated by your husband, as from the striking contrast between your person and his, I can readily divine the secret anguish of your life, the painful mysteries of that ill-assorted union in which you have taken the lot of suffering upon yourself alone. Marianna, though your con-

duct is and has been unfailingly heroic, and though fortitude never deserts you in the performance of your cruel duties, perhaps in the silence of your solitary nights the heart which only now is beating so violently in your breast may from time to time have rebelled.

“Your husband’s worthiness is your worst torture. Had he been less noble, less pure, you might have deserted him; but your virtues are supported by his. It may be that you have at times speculated which of the two heroisms will first give way.

“You pursue the real grandeur of the task while Paolo is chasing his chimera. If you had only the love of duty to sustain and guide you, perhaps triumph might seem the easier; to kill your heart and carry your life into the region of abstractions might possibly suffice you; religion would absorb the rest; you would have lived for an idea, like those saintly women who extinguish at the foot of the cross all the instincts of their nature. But the pervading charm of Paolo’s person, the elevation of his soul, his rare and affecting proofs of tenderness, constantly drag you down from that ideal world where virtue tried to keep you; they have excited forces within you which are being incessantly exhausted in contending against the phantom of love. But now the time has come in which you must no longer deceive yourself. You never suspected this. The faintest glimmer of hope kept you in the pursuit of this sweet dream.

“Year after year of disillusion has undermined your patience; an angel would long ago have lost it. To-day the phantom so long pursued is naught but a shadow without substance. Madness so closely allied to genius can never know a cure in this world. You have at last become aware of this fact, you have glanced backward on your vanished youth, lost, if not sacrificed; you bitterly perceive the blunder of nature that gave you a father only when you sought a husband. You ask yourself whether you have not gone beyond the

duties of a wife in keeping yourself faithful to a man who knows no mistress but science. Marianna, let your hand remain in mine; all that I have told you is true. You have looked around you—but now you were in Paris, not in Italy, where only men know how to love——”

“Oh! let me finish the tale,” cried Marianna; “it were better fitting that I say these things myself. I will be frank; I feel that I address my truest friend. Yes, I was in Paris when all you have so lucidly explained took place within me, for nowhere had I met the love I had dreamed of from childhood up.

“My poor dress, my so poor abode, concealed me from the notice of men like yourself. The few young men I met here, whose position did not allow of their insulting me, are odious to me; these scoff at my husband as a rambling old dotard; some only court him the more easily to betray him; all aim at getting me separated from him; none of them all can understand the adoration I have vowed to that soul which is so far away from us only because it is so much nearer heaven; nor the love I feel for that friend, brother, whose handmaid I would ever be. You alone have understood the tie that binds me to him. Tell me that your interest in my Paolo is sincere, without an object——”

“I accept your praises,” interrupted Andrea, “but do not go further; do not compel me to contradict you. I love you, Marianna, as we know how to love in that glorious country where you and I were born. I love you with all my soul, with all my strength; but before I tender you this love, I intend to make myself worthy of your affection.

“I will make a last effort to give back to you the man you have loved since childhood, and whom, most probably, you will never cease to love. While awaiting success or defeat, accept, with no trace of shame, the modest comforts which I can give you both. To-morrow we will look out a suitable abode for him.

“Is your esteem sufficiently great to allow me to be a sharer in your guardianship?”

Marianna, astounded by such generosity, held out her hand to the count; he took it, and departed, endeavoring to evade the civilities of Giardini and his wife.

Next day Andrea was taken up to the room in which Gambara and his wife lived. Though Marianna fully recognized the noble nature of her lover (for there are natures which can quickly read), she was too good a housewife not to show embarrassment on receiving so great a gentleman in so humble a chamber. But it was exquisitely clean. She had spent the morning in dusting her motley furniture, the handiwork of Signor Giardini, who had devoted his moments of leisure in constructing it from the woodwork of instruments which had been discarded by Gambara.

Never in his life had Andrea seen anything so amazing. To keep a sober countenance he was compelled to turn away his eyes from a bed, so grotesquely manufactured by the ingenious cook out of the case of an old harpsichord, to look at Marianna's narrow couch, of which the single mattress was covered with a white lawn counterpane, a circumstance which surcharged his mind with sad, but some sweet thoughts.

He wished to talk of his plans and morning's work; but the enthusiastic Gambara, who believed that he had at last found a willing auditor, seized upon the count and made him listen to an opera which he had written for the Parisians.

“In the first place, monsieur,” said Gambara, “allow me to explain the subject in two words. Here in Paris people who receive a musical impression do not work it out in their own minds, as religion teaches us to develop sacred texts, by meditation and prayer. It is therefore very difficult to make them understand that there exists in nature an eternal theme, disturbed only by fluctuations independent of the Divine will, as passions are uncontrolled by the will of men.

"It became necessary that I should seek some vast framework in which to combine cause and effect, for my music aims at presenting a picture of the life of nations taken at its loftiest points of view. My opera, for I myself wrote the *libretto* (as no poet could have fittingly developed the subject), gives the life of Mahomet, a personage who unites the magic of ancient Sabæanism and the Oriental poetry of the Jewish Scriptures, resulting in one of the grandest of human epics—the dominion of the Arab.

"Mahomet, without a doubt, borrowed the idea of despotic government from the Jews, and the progressive movement which created the brilliant empire of the caliphs from the pastoral or Sabæan religions. The prophet's destiny was stamped upon him at his birth—his father was a Pagan, his mother a Jewess. Ah! my dear count, to be a great musician one must also be very learned. Without education there can be no local color; in fact, no musical ideas. The musician who only sings to sing is but an artisan, not an artist.

"This magnificent opera is a continuation of the great work I had already commenced. My first opera was called 'The Martyrs;' I intend to write a third one on 'Jerusalem Delivered.' You can of course discern the beauty of this trilogy and the manifold motives it affords. The Martyrs, Mahomet, Jerusalem! The God of the Occident, the God of the Orient, and the struggle of their religionists about a tomb. But let us not speak of my fame for ever gone. Listen to the argument of my opera."

He paused.

"The first act," he went on, "shows Mahomet as a porter living in the house of Khadijah, a rich widow with whom his uncle has placed him. He is in love and ambitious. Driven from Mecca he flies to Medina, and dates his era from the time of his flight, the Hegira.

"The second act presents him as a prophet founding a religion militant. The third shows him disgusted with all

things ; having exhausted life, he seeks to conceal his death that he may be deemed a god, last effort of human pride.

“ Now you shall judge of my method of expressing in sound a great fact which poetry can only imperfectly render in words.”

Gambara seated himself at the piano with a calm and collected air, and his wife brought the voluminous sheets of the score, which, however, he did not open.

“ The whole opera,” said he, “ is founded on a base as on a fruitful soil. Mahomet must therefore have a majestic bass voice, and necessarily his first wife must have a contralto one. Khadijah was quite old—twenty ! Attention ! Here is the overture. It begins *andante*, C-minor, triple time. Do you hear the sadness of the ambitious man whom love cannot satisfy ? Through his plaints, by a modulation to E-flat, *allegro*, common time, are heard the cries of the epileptic lover, his ravings, mingled with certain warlike sounds ; for the all-powerful scimitar of the caliphs begins to gleam before his eyes. The charms of the single wife give him that idea of the plurality of love which so forcibly impresses us in ‘ Don Giovanni.’ As you listen to this theme do you not already catch a glimpse of the paradise of Mahomet ?

“ Now we have, A-flat major, six-eight time, a *cantabile*, fit to create emotions of delight in those rebellious to all musical feeling ; Khadijah comprehends Mahomet ! Then Khadijah announces to the multitude the prophet’s conferences with the angel Gabriel—*maestoso sostenuto*, in F-minor.

“ The magistrates and priests, power and religion, feeling themselves attacked by the reformer, as Christ and Socrates attacked the effete, expiring religions and powers, turn upon Mahomet and drive him forth from Mecca—*stretto* in C-major. But now, pay heed ! comes my glorious dominant—G, common time. Arabia hears her prophet, the horsemen gather—G-major, E-flat, B-flat, G-minor, still common time. The mass of men gathers like an avalanche. The false prophet

practices on one tribe the deceptions he is so soon to impose upon a world—G-major.

“He promises universal dominion to the Arabs; they believe him because he is inspired. The *crescendo* begins—in the dominant still. Listen to the fanfare of the trumpets—C-major; brass instruments woven into the harmony, strongly marked, and asserting themselves as an expression of the first triumphs of victory. Medina is conquered for the prophet, the whole army marches on Mecca—burst of martial music—still in C-major. The whole power of the orchestra is worked up to a conflagration; every instrument gives voice; do you hear the torrents of harmony?

“Suddenly the *tutti* is interrupted by a graceful air—minor third. You hear the last strains of devoted love! The woman who upheld the great man dies, concealing her despair; dies, dies at the triumph of the man in whom love had become too mighty to be content with one woman; she adores him enough to sacrifice herself to the grandeur that destroys her. Soul of flame!

“But now behold! The desert invades the world—C-major again. The orchestra takes up the score in the terrific fifth of the fundamental bass which dies away—Mahomet is satiated; he has tasted all, he has exhausted all! But he craves to die a god. Arabia adores him in prayer; we fall back upon my first sad strain to which the curtain rose—C-minor.

“Do you not discern in this music,” said Gambara, ceasing to play and turning toward the count, “in this vivid, picturesque music, abrupt, jostling, melancholy, fantastic, but always grand, the expression of an epileptic frantic after enjoyment, unable to read or write, making his very defects a stepping-stone to his grandeur, transferring blunder and disaster into triumphs? Do you not obtain from this overture—an epitome of the opera—an idea of his seductive power over a greedy and lustful race?”

The face of the maestro, at first calm and stern, on which

Andrea had been trying to divine the meaning of the ideas he was uttering with an inspired voice, though the chaotic flood of notes estopped his hearer from comprehending, grew even more animated until it took on an impassioned, fiery glow which infected Marianna and the cook. Marianna, deeply affected by the passages in which she read her own position, could not hide the agitation from Andrea.

Gambara wiped his forehead and threw his glance with such force to the ceiling that he seemed to pierce it and rise upward to the skies.

"You have seen the vestibule," said he; "now we enter the temple. The opera begins:

"ACT I. Mahomet, alone on the stage, sings an air—F-natural, common time, interrupted by a chorus of camel-drivers, who surround a well at the rear of the stage—contrary time, twelve-eight. What majestic grief! It touches the heart of the most frivolous woman, piercing the soul if she has no heart. Is not this the very expression of repressed genius?"

To Andrea's very great amazement (for Marianna was accustomed to it) Gambara contracted his larynx so violently that choking sounds issued thence, something like the attempted growl of a watch-dog which has lost its voice. A light froth arose on the composer's lips and caused Andrea to shudder.

"His wife appears—A-minor. Magnificent duet! In this number I make it known that Mahomet has the will, his wife the brains. Khadijah announces that she is about undertaking a work which will bereave her of the love of her young husband. Mahomet aspires to conquer the world; his wife divines his purpose; she seconds his endeavor by persuading the people of Mecca that her husband's epileptic fits are due to his commerce with the angels. Chorus of Mahomet's first disciples, who press forward to promise him their help—C-sharp minor, *sotto voce*. Mahomet *exuient* to speak with the angel Gabriel—*recitative* in F-major. His wife encourages

the chorus—*aria*, accompanied by chorus; gusts of chanting voices sustain Khadijah's grand, majestic song—A-major.

"Abdallah, the father of Ayesha, the only maiden that Mahomet has found to be a virgin, whose name he thereupon changes to Abu-Bekr, the father of the virgin, comes forward with Ayesha and sings against the chorus, taking up Khadijah's in contrapuntal treatment. Omar, father of Hafsah, another virgin who is to be Mahomet's concubine, follows Abu-Bekr's example; he and his daughter join in and form a quintette. The virgin Ayesha is first soprano; Hafsah, mezzo soprano; Abu-Bekr is a bass; Omar a baritone.

"Mahomet returns inspired.

"He sings his first bravura *aria*, the beginning of the *finale*—E-major; he promises the empire of the world to those who believe in him. The prophet sees the two maidens, by a soft transition—from B-major to G-major; he turns to amorous tones. Ali, Mahomet's cousin, and Kâhled, his greatest general, both tenors, now appear and announce the persecution; the magistrates, the soldiers, and rulers have banished the prophet—*recitative*.

"Mahomet now makes an invocation to the angel Gabriel in C. He declares that the angel is with him, and points out a pigeon flying above his head. The chorus of believers make reply in tones of devotion—modulating to B-major. The soldiers, magistrates, and officials arrive—*tempo di marcia*, B-major. Struggle between the two forces—*strette* in E-major. Mahomet, in a succession of diminished sevenths in a descending theme, yields to the storm and takes to flight. The savage, sombre color of the *finale* is raised somewhat by the phrases of the three women, who utter predictions of Mahomet's triumph; and these *motifs* will be found further accentuated in the third act, where Mahomet is found enjoying the delights of splendor."

Tears arose in Gambara's eyes; he controlled his emotion and resumed:

“ACT II. Behold religion is now established. Arabs guard the prophet’s tent, who confers with God—chorus in A-minor. Mahomet appears—prayer in F. What a majestic and noble strain underlies this chant in the bass voices, in which, I believe, I have enlarged the limits of melody! It seemed necessary to express the marvels of that immense uprising which created an architecture, a poetry, a music; with its own manners, customs, and morals.

“As you listen you walk beneath the arches of the Generalife and thread the vaulted portals of the Alhambra. The *fiorituri* of the melody paint the exquisite Moorish arabesques, the gallant and warlike religion which was presently to meet in battle the noble and valorous chivalry of Christianity. A few brass instruments now sound the first notes of triumph—by a broken *cadenza*. The Arabs, on their knees, worship the prophet—E-flat major. Khâled, Amrou, and Ali enter—*tempo di marcia*. The armies of the Faithful have taken many towns and conquered the three Arabias. Such a sonorous *recitative*. Mahomet rewards his generals by giving them maidens.

“And here comes in,” said Gambara, ruefully, “one of those wretched ballets which cut the thread of our finest musical tragedies. But Mahomet—B-minor—redeems it by his transcendent prophecy, which that poor Monsieur de Voltaire describes in these words:

“‘Arabia’s day at last has come.’

“The chorus of Arabs breaks triumphant—six-eight time, *accelerando*. Now the tribes in multitude come on; horns and brass join in the orchestra. General rejoicings ensue, by degrees all the voices take part, and Mahomet declares polygamy.

“In the midst of all this triumph the woman who has done so much for Mahomet pours forth a magnificent *aria*—B-major. ‘And I,’ sings she, ‘am I no longer loved?’ ‘We must part,’ he responds. ‘Thou art a woman, I am a prophet;

slaves I may have, equals never.' Hearken to this duet—G-sharp minor. What anguish! The woman realizes the grandeur to which she has been the means of elevating Mahomet; she loves him enough to sacrifice herself to his glory, she adores him as a god, she judges not, she murmurs not. Poor woman! his first dupe, his first victim! What a subject for the *finale*—B-major.

"Behold the sombre grief standing out against the acclamations of the chorus, mingling with the tones of Mahomet as he flings his wife aside as a used-out instrument, and yet causes us to understand that he can never forget her. What fireworks of triumph, what red fire of joyous, rippling songs gush from the voices of Ayesha and Hafsa (*premiere* and *mezzo* soprano), further sustained by Ali and his wife, by Omar and Abu-Bekr. Weep, rejoice! Triumph and tears! Of such is life."

Marianna could not restrain her sobs; Andrea was so deeply moved that his eyes grew moist. The Neapolitan cook, shaken by the magnetic current of ideas generated by the spasmodic accents of Gambara's voice, was overcome by emotion like the rest.

The composer turned around to the group; he smiled.

"You understand me at last!" cried he.

No conqueror haled in triumph to the Capitol, amid the purple radiance of his glory and the acclamations of a nation, ever wore such an expression when the crown was placed upon his head as Gambara did at this time. His face had the halo of a martyred saint. None undeceived him. A dreadful smile flickered on Marianna's lips. The count was appalled by the artless, blind insanity.

"ACT III.," said the rapt musician, again seating himself at the piano:

"Solo, *andantino*, Mahomet unhappy though in his seraglio surrounded by women. Quartette of houris—A-major. What pomp of harmony, what trills as those of a happy nightingale!

It modulates into F-sharp minor. The theme is given on the dominant (E) and is then repeated in A-major. Here all delights are grouped visibly to the senses and produce a grand contrast to the sombre *finale* of the first act.

"After the dances Mahomet arises and sings a grand *bravura*—F-minor. He regrets the singleness and devotion of his first wife, but acknowledges himself as wedded to polygamy. Never did musician have so grand a subject. The orchestra and women's chorus express the joys of the houri; meanwhile Mahomet reverts to the sad strain of the beginning.

"Where is Beethoven?" cried Gambara; "where, then, is that soul who only could understand the majestic overturning of my opera upon itself. See how completely all depends upon the bass; thus did Beethoven construct his symphony in C.

"But his heroic movement is purely instrumental, while mine is sustained by a sextette of glorious human voices, and a chorus of believers who are on guard at the gate of the sacred dwelling. I have here collected all the treasures of melody and harmony, vocal and orchestral. Listen to the utterance of all human life, rich or poor: BATTLE, TRIUMPH, SATIETY.

"Ali enters; everywhere the Koran is triumphant—duet, D-minor. Mahomet places himself in the hands of his two fathers-in-law; he is weary of all; he will abdicate and die in secret after he has consolidated his religion. Magnificent sextette—B-flat major! He bids all farewell—solo in F-natural. His two fathers-in-law, appointed his vicars or caliphs, summon the people. A grand triumphal march. Prayer of the Arabs kneeling before the sacred dwelling, the Kasba, whence a pigeon takes its flight—same key. This prayer, sung by sixty voices and led by women—B-flat—crowns my stupendous work, which so well expresses the life of men and nations. Here you have heard every emotion, human or divine."

Andrea was overcome with sheer amazement. He was much affected by this good man's mania, he colored, and stole a glance at Marianna; while she became pallid and turned her eyes downward, silently weeping. Had he not been shocked by the irony which the man showed as he presented the feelings of Mahomet's wife and yet not perceiving the same emotions in Marianna, the madness of the husband was eclipsed by the craziness of the composer. There was not the least resemblance to musical or poetical ideas in the loud blathering which oppressed his ears. All the principles of harmony, the first rules of composition, were quite ignored in this formless creation. Instead of a theme scientifically worked out such as had been described by Gambara, his fingers had brought out a succession of fifths, sevenths, octaves, major thirds, progressions of fourths, minus the sixths in the bass—a jumble of discordant sound, randomly made, as though intended to destroy the ear of the least sensitive of listeners. It is impossible to attempt a description of this grotesque execution; new words must needs be coined to portray this impossible music.

During its execution he had closed his eyes in ecstasy; had smiled upon his piano; had frowned at it; put out his tongue after the manner of an inspired performer. He had been, in fact, intoxicated by the poetry of the thoughts that peopled his brain—he had vainly endeavored the utterance of them. The strange discords had evidently been to him celestial harmonies. Beyond any doubt the vision of his inspired blue eyes in rapt enjoyment of another world; the rosy glow of his cheeks; above all, the heavenly serenity stamped upon his lofty features, would have led any deaf man to believe that he was present at the improvisation of some maestro. The illusion would have been the more perfect because the mechanical execution of this crazy music required immense skill in fingering. Gambara must have worked at it for years.

His hands were not alone employed; his feet were constant

in the pedaling; perspiration streamed down his face as he labored to fully emphasize a *crescendo* by all the feeble means which a decrepit piano afforded. He stamped, snorted, puffed, and shouted; his fingers darted hither and thither like the forked fangs of a snake; finally, as the piano uttered its last growl, he flung himself backward and let his head rest on the back of the chair.

"*Per Bacco!* I am stunned, dizzy," cried Andrea, escaping from the chamber. "A child dancing on the keyboard would make better music."

"Certainly," said Giardini. "All that chance could do couldn't manage to avoid hitting two notes in concord than that devil of a fellow has done during the hour now gone."

"How comes it that the regular features of Marianna's beauty remain?" muttered the count to himself. "Such an incessant hearing of so hideous melody must change anything. She will grow ugly."

"*Signor conte*, she must be saved from that," cried Giardini.

"Yes," said Andrea, "I have been thinking of that. But to be sure that my plans are not built upon the sands, I must test my thoughts by yet another experiment. To-morrow I will return and examine the instruments he has invented; after dinner we will have a little supper (*medianoche*). I provide the wine and a few fancy dishes."

The cook bowed low.

The next day was spent by the count in arranging the suite of rooms in which he intended domiciling the poor household.

He returned in the evening to the Rue Froidmanteau and found the wine and so forth set out by Marianna and Giardini, displaying some little taste. Gambara with much pride showed him some little drums, on which lay grains of gunpowder, by which means he made observations on the pitch and temperament of the sounds emitted by his instruments.

"Do you see," said he, "by what simple means I am able to demonstrate a great proposition? Acoustics by this means

reveal actions analogous to sound on every object which that sound affects. All harmonies start from a common centre and always retain an intimate relation to each other; rather, harmony, like light, is decomposed by our art as a ray is by a prism."

Here Gambara proceeded to show Andrea the instruments constructed according to his principles, and he explained the changes he had made in their shape and material. Finally he announced, with gravity, that, to properly conclude this preliminary evening, which had thus far only gratified the curiosity of the eye, he would allow all then present to hear an instrument which was capable of taking the place of an entire orchestra; he called this the *panharmonicon*.

"If it is the arrangement in that case which causes a grumbling of all the neighbors," said Giardini, "when you are working on it, you won't do much playing thereon, for the police will interfere. Bear that in mind."

"If that unhappy idiot remains in the room," whispered Gambara in Andrea's ear, "it will be impossible that I should play."

The count made a pretext to get rid of the cook by promising him a present if he would stay downstairs and prevent the police and neighbors from interfering. Giardini, who had not stinted his own allowance of wine while pouring out for the others, willingly complied.

The composer, while not intoxicated, was in that elevated condition when every function of the brain is overexcited; when the opaque walls become transparent, the garret roofless, and the soul takes flight into the world of spirits.

Marianna, not without difficulty, uncovered an instrument about the size of a grand piano; but with an upper manual and a great double case, not altogether unlike the boxing of an organ. This curious machine was also provided with stops for various instruments, and the bent elbows of a number of tubes or pipes.

“Will you play for me the prayer which you say is so fine, the *finale* of your opera?” asked the count.

To Andrea's great astonishment and Marianna's surprise, Gambara commenced with a few chords in perfect harmony that proclaimed him a master; their astonishment was succeeded by admiration and in turn by complete rapture; they entirely lost sight of the place and performer. The effects of a full orchestra would have been less fine than the reedy tone of the wind instruments, which swelled like an organ and formed a marvelous blend with the string harmonies. But the unfinished state of this machine prevented the full development of the composer's ideas, which seemed the greater for the sense of incompleteness. It may be remarked that certain perfections in works of art seem rather to detract from than improve the unfinished sketch; for one may then add the deficiency by his own thoughts.

The purest and sweetest music that Andrea had ever heard rose from under the impact of Gambara's fingers like incense from an altar. The composer's voice became again youthful; so far from marring the fine melody, it expounded, supported, and directed it; as the quavering voice of a reader like Andrieux gives scope to the meaning of some great scene by Corneille or Racine by lending it a personal and sympathetic emotion.

This angelic music revealed the treasures that lay hidden in the grand opera which could never be understood so long as this man persisted in the endeavor to explain it in his normal state of dementia.

Marianna and Andrea, equally divided between delight of the music and surprise at the strange instrument with its hundred-voiced stops, in which a stranger might think a choir of young girls was hidden, so closely did some of the tones resemble the human voice, dared not exchange ideas either by word or look. Marianna's countenance was radiant with a glow of hope, which revived the beauty of her youth.

This new birth of beauty, in connection with the luminosity of her husband's genius, cast a shadowy tinge of sadness over the pleasure that this mysterious hour had given the count.

"You are our good spirit!" Marianna whispered to him. "I am tempted to think that you inspire him, for I, who am never away from his side, have never yet heard anything like this."

"Khadijah's farewell," said Gambara; who now sang the *cavatina* which he had the previous evening described as being sublime, and which now brought tears to the eyes of the lovers, so perfectly did it express the noblest sentiments of devoted love.

"Who can have inspired you with such music?" cried the count.

"The spirit," answered Gambara. "When he appears, flame is all around me. I see the melodies face to face; fresh, beautiful, in floral coloring. They sparkle, they echo—I listen. But an infinity of time is necessary to reproduce them."

"Play on," said Marianna.

Gambara, who seemed not to feel fatigue, played without effort or untowardness. He executed the overture with such facility and skill, he showed such new and undiscovered musical effects, that the count was dazzled by what he heard; he began to believe in some magic like that controlled by Liszt and Paganini—a genius of execution which can change all musical conditions and create of it a poetry transcendent of all conditions of music.

"Well, excellenza, and can you cure him?" asked Giar dini, when at length Andrea went down.

"I shall soon be able to say," replied the count. "The man's intellect has two windows: one is turned toward the earth and is closed; the other looks in upon heaven. The first is music, the second poetry. Until now he would stand stubbornly before the closed window; we must get him to the

other. It was you, Giardini, that first put me on the track of this truth, by letting me know that his mind was clearer after a few glasses of wine."

"Yes," cried the cook, "and I can guess your scheme, *eccellenza*."

"If it is not too late to make poetry ring in his ears to the sound of a glorious harmony, we must put him into a condition to hear and judge of it. Now it seems to me that only intoxication can bring this about. Will you assist me in this? You won't be any the worse for it, eh?"

"What is your excellency getting at?"

Andrea made no answer, but went away laughing at the perspicacity of the crazy mind of the Neapolitan.

On the following day Marcosini came to fetch away Marianna and show her the lodging he had secured. She had used the morning in fixing up a simple but decent dress, into which she had put the whole of her little savings. The change would have been the disillusion of a mere dangler; but the fancy of the count had now become a settled passion.

Marianna, stripped of her picturesque poverty, was transformed outwardly into a mere bourgeoisie, and gave Andrea visions of a wedded life; he gave her his hand in assisting her into the hackney-coach, and acquainted her with his ideas. She smiled and approved; she was happy at finding her admirer more lofty, more generous, more disinterested than she had dared to hope. He soon reached the new dwelling, where Andrea had endeavored to keep himself ever in her thoughts by adding a few of those little elegancies which beguile the most virtuous of women.

"I will never mention my love to you until we despair of Paolo's sanity," he said to her, as they returned to the Rue Froidmanteau. "You shall be witness to the sincerity of my efforts. If these prove successful, I may be unable to keep up my part as only your friend. If this happens I shall flee you,

Marianna. I have firmness enough, I think, to work for your happiness, though I may not have enough to look upon it."

"Do not say such things," said Marianna, with difficulty keeping back her tears. "Has not generosity its dangers, also? But are you going so soon?"

"Yes," said Andrea, "seek your happiness without my drawback."

If Giardini is to be believed, the excellent change of air and living was favorable to both husband and wife. Every evening after his wine, Gambara appeared less absent-minded, talked more, and was more sedate; he even proposed to read the papers. Andrea quaked in his shoes at each manifestation of his success; but, though his distress made him aware of the strength of his passion, this did not cause him to relax his virtuous resolution. He now came every evening to learn the progress of this singular cure. On one occasion the state of the patient gave him satisfaction, but his pleasure was dazed by Marianna's beauty, for her life being rendered less onerous had restored her brilliant loveliness.

He joined each evening in the conversations, grave or gay, in which he argued coolly and dispassionately against Gambara's singular theories. He used the remarkable lucidity of the latter's mind, on every point that did not touch upon his malady, to make him clearly perceive and acknowledge principles in other branches of art and which he afterward demonstrated were equally applicable to music.

All went well so long as the composer's brain was under the influence of the fumes of wine; but just as soon as he became perfectly sober his reason was dethroned—he was again the maniac. And yet, in the main, Paolo was more easily aroused by impressions from the outer world; his mind even began to employ itself on a greater diversity of subjects.

Andrea, who took all an artist's interest in his semi-medical treatment, thought at length that it was about time to try

a master-stroke. He resolved to give a dinner at his own house, to which he intended inviting Giardini for the purpose, as he told himself, of not separating the sublime and the ridiculous. He selected the day that "Robert le Diable," an opera he had already heard in rehearsal, was for the first time given in public.

After the second course Gambara was already half-seas over, he was laughing at himself with a good grace, while Giardini was admitting that his own culinary innovations were of the devil.

Andrea had neglected no means to bring about this twofold miracle. Flagons of Orvieto and Montefiascone, expensive wines which are easily spoiled if carelessly carried; liqueurs of Lachrymæ Christi, and Giro, and other heady liqueurs of *la cara patria* or the beloved country, soon caused the double intoxication, in these excitable minds, of grape and reminiscence. At dessert the musician and the cook mutually abjured every heresy; one hummed a *cavatina* from Rossini, the other piled confectionery on his plate and washed them down with maraschino from Zara, to the honor of the *cuisine Française*.

The count took advantage of Gambara's happy frame of mind to carry him off to the opera, whither he allowed himself to be led like a lamb.

With the first notes of the introduction Gambara's inebriety vanished, and gave place for the feverish excitement which at times brought his judgment and imagination into harmony; the habitual discord of which was the undoubted source of his insanity. The dominant idea of that great musical drama appeared to him in all its radiant simplicity, like a flash of lightning breaking through the clouds of darkness in which he lived. To his unsealed eyes the music seemed to sweep the immense horizons of world in which he found himself for the first time, though he recognized it as what he had seen in his dreams.

He fancied himself transported to those slopes of his own

dear native country where *la bella Italia* commences, and which Napoleon so appropriately termed the "glacis of the Alps." His memory took him back to the day when his young, vigorous brain was not yet troubled by the fervid imagination; he listened in reverent awe, unwilling to miss a word. The count respected the travail of his soul. Till after twelve o'clock he sat so motionless that the opera-house audience might have taken him for a drunken man—which he was. On his way home the count began to attack Meyerbeer's masterpiece, trying to arouse Gambara, who was now plunged in the half-torpid state of drunkenness.

"What is there in that incoherent score that it makes a somnambulist of you?" said Andrea, when they arrived at his house. "The story of 'Robert le Diable' is not altogether without interest, I'll admit. Holtei has very happily worked out with much skill a well-written drama, full of strong and moving situations, but the French librettists have managed to make it the most absurd bundle of nonsense. No libretto of even Vesari or Schikaneder has ever equaled in absurdity the words of 'Robert le Diable;' it becomes a dramatic nightmare, which oppresses the hearer without arousing any deep emotion.

"Meyerbeer's devil plays too prominent a part. Bertram and Alice represent the contest between right and wrong, the good and evil spirit. That antagonism offers a splendid opportunity to the composer. The sweetest melodies, placed side by side with harsh and crude airs, is the natural consequence of the libretto; but, unfortunately, in the score of the German composer the devils sing better than the saints.

"The heavenly inspirations give the lie to their origin; when the composer leaves the infernal lay for a moment, he returns as speedily as may be, worn out with the effort of trying to be rid of them. Melody, the golden thread that should never be broken in so vast a scheme, is often strained to the vanishing point in Meyerbeer's work. Sentiment is

absolutely lacking ; the heart has no part in it ; we find few of those delightful inventions, those artless themes which touch our sympathies and leave a tender impression on the soul.

"Harmony reigns supreme, instead of being the groundwork from whence should issue the melodious groups of the musical picture. Those discordant notes, far from moving the hearer, only excite in him a sentiment similar to the one he would experience in seeing a tight-rope walker hanging, as it were, midway between life and death. The soothing arias never come at the right moment to quieten this nervous agitation. One might well believe that the composer had no other object in view than to produce a bizarre effect, not troubling himself about musical truth or unity ; or about the capability of the human voice, which is overwhelmed in this flood of instrumental hurly-burly."

"Hush, my friend !" said Gambara, "I am still under the influence of that glorious chorus of hell, made still more terrible by those long trumpets—a new instrumentation. The broken *cadenzas* which add such vigor to Robert's scene, the *cavatina* in the fourth act, the *finale* to the first, still hold me in the clutch of some superhuman power. No, even Gluck's compositions never produced so powerful an effect ; I am amazed at such skill."

"*Signor Maestro*," said Andrea smiling, "permit me to contradict you. Before Gluck wrote he pondered long ; he calculated the chances and adopted plans which might afterward be modified under his inspirations in their details, but he never allowed himself to stray from the marked-out path. Therein lies his power of emphasis ; that elocution of music which has life and truth in every beat.

"I agree with you that the science of Meyerbeer's opera is very great ; but science becomes a defect when isolated from inspiration ; I think I can see in that opera the painful work of a cultivated craftsman, who in his music has interlarded gems from many forgotten sources, or from damned operas ;

these he has extended, remodeled, or concentrated. But he has fallen into the usual error of the plagiarist, an abuse of good things. This clever gleaner in the harvest-fields of music is prodigal in discords, which, when too frequently introduced, end by annoying the ear; it becomes habituated to startling effects, such as a composer should be chary in giving, so that he may obtain the full benefit when the situation demands it.

“This inharmonic phrasing is repeated to satiety, and the abuse of the plagal cadence* detracts from the religious solemnity of the work.

“Of course I am well aware that every composer has his particular methods to which he will return again and again in spite of himself; but he should watch and guard himself against that blunder. A picture that had none but blues and reds in it would be unfaithful to nature, beside fatiguing to the eye. Thus the constantly recurring rhythm of the score of ‘Robert le Diable’ gives monotony to the whole. As to the effect of the long trumpets, of which you speak, it has long been known in Germany, and what Meyerbeer gives us for novelty was constantly utilized by Mozart, who makes his chorus of devils in ‘Don Giovanni’ sing in that manner.”

By these contradictions and renewed libations Andrea strove to bring Gambara back to his proper musical senses; he endeavored to show him that his so-called mission to the world was not to regenerate an art beyond his powers, but to seek expression for his ideas under another form, by poetry, in fact.

“You, my dear count, do not understand the least thing about that stupendous musical drama,” said Gambara airily.

He stood in front of Andrea’s piano, struck the keys, listened to the tone, then seated himself, meditating for a few moments as if to collect his ideas.

* The chord of the sub-dominant followed by that of the dominant.—
TRANS.

"In the first place you must know," said he, "that a trained ear like mine perceived at once that labor of setting of which you speak. Yes, this music has been lovingly selected from the store of a rich and fertile imagination into which science has squeezed ideas which are to bring out the very essence of music.

"I will illustrate this."

He rose to move the wax-candles into the adjoining room, and, before returning to his seat, he drank a large glass of Giro, a wine of Sardinia, as full of fire as any old Tokay has ever been.

"It is this," said Gambara, "this music was not written for skeptics nor for those who know not love. If you have never in your life experienced the vehement assaults of an evil spirit, who ever moves the object at which you are about to take aim, who brings to a painful end your liveliest hopes—in one word, if you have never felt the devil's tail whisking about the world—the opera of '*Robert le Diable*' must be to you what the Apocalypse is to those who think that all ends when they do. But if, persecuted and wretched, you understand that spirit of evil, that so great ape which hourly is engaged in destroying the work of God; if you imagine him as not having loved, but of ravishing an almost divine woman, and gaining from that deed the joys of paternity; as so loving his son that he would rather have him miserable to all eternity than to think of his being in eternal happiness with God; if, again, you can imagine the soul of the mother hovering around her son to draw him away from the atrocious temptations offered by his father, you, even then, will have but a faint idea of that stupendous poem, in which little is wanting for it to become the rival of Mozart's '*Don Giovanni*.'

"'*Don Giovanni*' is, I admit, the superior by the perfection of its form. '*Robert le Diable*' represents ideas; '*Don Giovanni*' arouses sensations. '*Don Giovanni*' is still the

only musical work in which harmony and melody are exactly balanced. In this lies its superiority to 'Robert le Diable,' for 'Robert' is the richer work.

"But to what good are these comparisons, since both works are beautiful in their own way? To me, subject as I have been to the oft-repeated assaults of the demon, 'Robert' speaks more powerfully than to you; I find it at once vast and concentrated.

"Thanks to you, I have been transported to the land of dreams, where our senses expand, where the universe unfolds in gigantic scale in comparison with man."

He was silent for a moment.

"I am still quivering," continued the unlucky artist, "at the sound of those four measures of the cymbals, which shook my very being when they open that short, abrupt introduction where the trombone solo, the flutes, oboes, and the clarionet cast a fantastic color over the soul. The *andante* in C-minor is a foretaste of the invocation of spirits in the abbey; it gives grandeur to the scene by its announcement of a purely spiritual struggle. I shuddered!"

Gambara struck the keys with a firm hand and developed Meyerbeer's theme in a masterly *fantasia*, a kind of explosion after the manner of Liszt. The instrument was no longer a piano, it was an orchestra they heard—the Genius of music rose before them.

"That is Mozart," he cried. "Hear how that German handles his chords; see through what intricate modulations he raises the image of terror to come to the dominant of C. I can hear all hell there!"

"The curtain rises.

"What do I see? The only spectacle to which we can give the epithet infernal; an orgy of Knights in Sicily. The chorus in F contains every human passion let loose in that bacchanalian *allegro*. Every thread by which the devil holds us is pulled. That is the kind of joy that comes over men

when they dance on the verge of a precipice ; they whirl themselves into vertigo. What 'go' in that chorus !

"From that chorus, the reality of life, an artless bourgeois of every-day existence stands out—G-minor—in the song by Rimbaut, full as it is of simplicity. That worthy man, who is the representative of the fresh verdure of plenteous Normandy, refreshes my soul as he recalls it to Robert's mind in the midst of his drunkenness. The sweetness of that beloved land shines like a thread of gold in the dark texture of the scene.

"Now comes the marvelous ballad in C-major, accompanied by the chorus in C-minor, so expressive of the theme. Then the outburst '*Je suis Robert*'—I am Robert. The rage of the prince offended by his vassal is no longer a natural fury ; but presently it calms down, for memories of childhood arise, with those of Alice, in that gracefully pretty *allegro*—A-major.

"Do you not hear the cries of the persecuted innocent as it enters this infernal drama ? 'No, no !' " sang Gambara, and making the piano echo him. "His native land and its sweet memories bloom anew in Robert's heart ; his mother's shade now arises, bringing in its train soothing religious thoughts. Religion it is that inspires that beautiful song in E-major, with its miraculous progressions in harmony and melody, in the words :

' Car dans les cieux, comme sur la terre
Sa mère va prier pour lui.'*

The struggle begins between the mysterious powers and the only human being who has the fire of hell in his veins to resist them. To make this quite clear, as Bertram comes on, the great musician gives the orchestra a *ritornello* reminiscent of Rimbaut's ballad. What art ! What cohesion of every part ! What strength of construction !

* For in the skies as on the earth
For him his mother prayeth.

"The devil is beneath all; he hides, he squirms. With the terror of Alice, who recognizes the devil of the image of St. Michael in her own Norman village, the conflict of the powers antagonistic begins. The musical theme develops—in what varied phrases! The antithesis so necessary in every opera is emphatically shown in a grand *recitative*, such as Gluck might have composed, between Bertram and Robert:

‘Tu ne sauras jamais à quel excès je t’aime.’*

In that diabolical C-minor, Bertram, in his terrible bass, which countermines and destroys every effort of the vehement, passionate man, is, to me, terribly appalling.

"Must the crime become possessed of the criminal? Will the executioner clutch his prey? Must misfortune swallow up the genius of the artist? Will the disease kill the patient? Can the guardian angel save the Christian?

"Now the *finale*, the gambling scene, in which he torments his son by rousing him to terrible emotions. Robert, despoiled, angry, destroying everything around him, eager for killing, breathing blood, fire, and sword, is his own son; the father sees the likeness. What horrid glee we note in Bertram's words, '*Je ris de tes coup!*' or, 'I laugh at thy blows!' How the Venetian *barcarole* tinges this *finale*! Through what bold transitions that infamous parent is brought on the stage again to drag Robert to once more throw the dice!

"This first act is overpowering to those who follow out such themes in the profundity of their thought and gives them the breadth of meaning the composer intends to convey.

"Love alone could be in contrast with that grand symphony of song, in which you cannot detect any monotony nor twice the employment of the same means. It is one, it is many; it is characteristic of all that is grand and natural. I breathe freer; I reach the higher sphere of a chivalrous court; I hear

* Never wilt thou understand to what excess I love thee.

Isabella in charming phrase, fresh, but always melancholy; and the female chorus in two divisions, echoing each other, with a suggestion, it seems, of the Moorish influence on Spain.

"Here the terrifying music is softened to a gentler tone, like a storm dying away, till it comes to this dainty flowery duet, so sweetly modulated and entirely unlike the preceding music. After the turmoil of a camp of martial heroes and free-lances comes a fair picture of love. Poet! I thank thee! My heart could not have borne more.

"If I could not here and there have plucked the daisies of a French light opera, if I had listened to the sweet gayety of a woman able alike to love and charm, I could not have endured that terrible, deep note with which Bertram reappears, as he says to his son: '*Si je le permets!*' (If I permit it); when Robert has promised, in his hearing, the princess he adores, that he will conquer with the arms she gives him.

"To the hope of the gambler reforming through love, the love of the exquisite Sicilian—do you not note that falcon eye?—to the hope of the man hell answers in that awful cry: '*A toi, Robert de Normandie!*'

"Does not the sombre horror of those long-held, splendid notes excite your admiration in that: '*Dans la forêt prochaine?*' All the fascinations of '*Jerusalem Delivered*' is to be found here, just as Chivalry appears in that chorus with the Spanish movement; and in the *tempo di marcia*. What originality in that *allegro*; in the modulation of the four cymbals in C-D, C-G! What grace in the call to the lists! The movement of the whole heroic life of the period is there; the soul unites with it; I read in it a romance, a poem of chivalry.

"The exposition now ends; the resources of the art of music appear to have been exhausted; and yet it was a homogeneous whole. You have had human life set before you in its one, its only real aspect. 'Shall I be happy or unhappy?' is the query of the philosopher. 'Shall I be saved or damned?' is that of the Christian."

Here Gambara struck the last chords of the chorus, which he brought forth in a lingering, melancholy way; he then rose and poured out and drank another large glass of Giro. This semi-African vintage again lit up the fires of his countenance, which had been somewhat paled by the passionate and wonderful sketch of Meyerbeer's opera that he had made.

"That nothing may be lacking to this composition," he resumed, "the great artist has given us the only *buffo* duet permissible for a devil to sing; that in which the unhappy troubadour is tempted. He puts a horror and a jest side by side, a jest that literally swallows up the only realism he had allowed himself in the weird opera—the pure, calm love of Alice and Raimbaut; their life is to be troubled by anticipatory evils. Only great souls can feel the nobility that animates these *buffo* airs.

"They have neither the gaudiness of our Italian music nor the vulgarity of our Parisian street favorites; they possess rather the divinity of Olympus. The bitter laugh of a divine being mocks the surprise of the Don-Juanized troubadour. Only for this dignity the return to the general tone of the opera would be too suddenly achieved, full as it is of terrible fury of diminished sevenths, and resolving into that infernal waltz, which at last brings us face to face with the howling demons.

"How vigorously Bertram's couplet detaches itself—B-minor—from the devil's chorus, in which is depicted the knowledge of paternity mingled in awful despair with demoniac voices! What an exquisite transition is the arrival of Alice, *ritornello* in B-flat. I still hear those voices of the angels in their heavenly freshness; it is the warble of the nightingale after the tempest.

"Thus is the leading idea of the whole worked out in detail; for what could better be done than the contrast with the tumult of demons in their den and the wonderful *aria* by Alice?

"The golden thread of the melody glides through the entire length of the grand harmony like a hope of heaven; it is embroidered on it with marvelous skill. She sings:

'Quand j'ai quitté la Normandie.*'

"Genius can never lose hold on the science that guides it. Here Alice's song in B-flat is taken up to F-sharp, the dominant of the chorus of devils. Do you hear the *tremolo* of the orchestra? Robert is being bidden to the rout of devils.

"Here Bertram reënters, and this is the culminating point of musical interest, a *recitative*, only comparable to the finest compositions of the greatest masters; comes the struggle in E-flat between the two combatants, Heaven and Hell—one in '*Oui, tu me connais!*' (Yes, thou knowest me!)—on a diminished seventh; the other in that sublime F, '*Le ciel est avec moi!*'—Heaven is with me! Hell and the crucifix are face to face.

"Then we have Bertram's threats to Alice, the most awful pathos ever written; the Genius of Evil complacently making himself known, and, as usual, tempting through self-interest. The arrival of Robert gives us the magnificent trio, unaccompanied, in A-flat; this opens the struggle between the two rival forces for the possession of the man. Note how clearly this is effected," exclaimed Gambara, who epitomized the scene with such passion of execution as startled Andrea.

"All this avalanche of music, from the crash of the cymbals in common time, has rolled onward to this contest of the three voices. The spell of Evil triumphs! Alice flees. You hear the duet between Bertram and Robert—in D. The devil fixes his talons in Robert's heart; he rends it for his own; he decants on every feeling—honor, hope, eternal pleasure, all are in turn displayed before him; he carries him, as he did Jesus, to the pinnacle of the temple, he shows him all the treasures of the earth, that jewel-case of Sin. Finally he

* When I forsook my Normandy.

piques his courage, he stings him, and the noble instincts of the man is expressed in that cry :

‘ Des chevaliers de ma patrie
L’honneur toujours fut le soutien.’

(To the knights of my native land,
Their mainstay was honor ever.)

To crown the whole opera comes in the same theme which so fatally prognosticated the work at its opening, that grand invocation to the dead :

‘ Nonnes qui reposez sous cette froide pierre,
M’entendez-vous ? ’

(Nuns who sleep beneath that cold, cold stone,
Hear ye me?)

Carried most gloriously through the career of the music, it ends equally gloriously in the *allegro vivace* of the bacchanal—D-minor. Here is the triumph of Hell! Roll on harmony! Swathe us in thy manifold cloak! Roll on, bewitching!

“The powers of the infernal have seized their prey. They hold him while they dance around him. The noble genius born to vanquish, born to reign, is lost! Devils rejoice, genius is stifled by poverty, passion wrecks the knight.”

Here Gambara improvised a *fantasia* himself, cleverly varying the *bacchanale*, and accompanying the piano in a soft tone of voice, as if to give utterance to the sufferings he had known.

“Do you hear the celestial complaints of neglected love?” said he. “Isabella calls Robert from the midst of that grand chorus of knights wending their way to the tournament, where the *motifs* of the second act reappear to emphasize the fact that the events of the third act happen in supernatural spheres. Here is real life again. The chorus fades away as the enchant-

ments of hell approach, which are brought by Robert with his talisman. Now develops the deviltries of the third act. First the viola duet, where the rhythm plainly depicts the brutal desires of a man who is omnipotent, while the princess, in plaintive moans, endeavors to recall her lover to reason.

“Here the musician has placed himself in a position that is very difficult to be brought out ; but he surmounts it by the sweetest gem in the whole work. What exquisite melody in the *cavatina* ‘*Grâce pour toi !*’ (Mercy for thee !) That one number would suffice to make any opera famous ; for every woman feels that she is contending against a knight. Never yet was music so passionate, so dramatic.

“The whole world now rises against the reprobate. Some may object that the *finale* resembles too much that of ‘Don Giovanni ;’ but there is this immense difference : a noble faith inspires Isabella, a perfect love that will rescue Robert, who scornfully rejects the talisman of hell confided to him, while, on the other hand, Don Giovanni persists in his unbelief. Beside all, this accusation has been made against every composer who has written a *finale* since the time of Mozart. The *finale* to ‘Don Giovanni’ is one of those classic forms that has been invented once for all time.

“At last we hear Religion, which arises omnipotent, in a voice that rules the universe, that calls all sorrow to come and be consoled, all repentances, that they may have peace.

“The whole house is stirred by the chorus :

‘Malheureux ou coupables,
Hâtez-vous d’accourir !’

(Now wretched, guilty men,
Haste to approach !)

Hitherto, in the fearful tumult of unchained passions, the Holy Voice had not been heard ; but at this critical moment it booms out like thunder ; the Catholic church divine rises

glorious in light. And I am astonished to here find at the close of such a lavish use of harmonic treasures a new vein of gold in that grand masterpiece of chorus: '*Gloire à la Providence!*' written in Handel's style.

"Robert, distracted, rushes on the stage with his heart-rending cry: '*Si je pouvais prier!*' (Could I but pray!) But, constrained by the edict of hell, Bertram pursues his son and makes a final effort. Alice calls up the vision of the Mother. Now you hear the glorious trio to which the whole opera has gradually advanced, the triumph of soul over matter, the victory of the spirit of Good over the spirit of Evil. The strains of faith prevail over the chorus of hell; joy reappears in majesty. Here the music weakens. I but see a cathedral instead of hearing a concert of angels in bliss; a divine prayer of souls delivered, consecrating the union of Robert and Alice. We ought not to be left under the spells of hell, we should be able to leave the scene with a heart of hope.

"Myself a Catholic and a musician, I needed for my soul another prayer like the one from 'Moses in Egypt.' Also would I fain have seen Germany contending with Italy—what Meyerbeer could do to rival Rossini.

"However, the writer may say, in justification of this defect, that, after five hours of such solid, substantial music, a Parisian prefers a bon-bon to a musical masterpiece. You heard the applause that followed the performance; it will run five hundred nights. If the French really understand that music——"

"It is because they have ideas," said the count.

"No, it is because it powerfully sets forth in definite shape an image of that struggle in which so many souls are worsted; and because all individual existences are connected with it by memory, as it were. Therefore is it that I, unhappy one, grieve that at the end I do not hear the sound of those celestial voices I have so often heard in dreams."

Here Gambara fell into a musical ecstasy; he improvised the

most lovely, melodious, and harmonious *cavatina* that Andrea should ever hear; a song divinely sung, on a theme as graceful and full of charm as that of *O filii et filiae*; but with such added beauties such as none but musical genius of the highest order could have rendered.

The count was lost in rapt admiration; the clouds were breaking; the celestial blue shone out; now angelic forms appeared and raised the veil that hid the sanctuary; the light of heaven descended.

Silence reigned again.

The count, surprised at the music suddenly ceasing, looked up at Gambara, who, with fixed, staring eyes and rigid form, stammered the word: "God!"

The count quietly awaited the moment when the composer returned from celestial glory, whither the prismatic wings of inspiration had borne him, resolving to illuminate his mind with the very truths that he himself should bring down.

"Well," said he, pouring out another bumper of wine and clinking glasses with him, "this German has written, as you say, a sublime opera without troubling himself about theory; whereas musicians who write grammars of music are, more than often, like literary critics—atrocious composers."

"Then you do not like my music?"

"I don't say that. But, if instead of perpetually dissecting the method of idea expression—which carries you beyond the mark—you would simply awaken our sensations, I feel sure that you would be better comprehended, unless, that is, you have not entirely mistaken your vocation. You are a great poet."

"What!" cried Gambara. "What, are five-and-twenty years of study simply wasted? Am I then to learn the imperfect utterance of man—I who hold the key to the language of heaven? Ah! should you be right—then I crave to die!"

"No, no, not you. You are great, you are strong. You shall begin a new life, and I, your friend, will sustain you.

We will show to the world the rare and noble alliance of a rich man and an artist who comprehend each other."

"Do you speak truth?" asked Gambara, rigid in a sudden torpor.

"As I have already said, you are more poet than musician."

"A poet, poet! That is better than nothing. But truly tell me, whom do you most esteem, Mozart or Homer?"

"I admire them equally."

"On your honor?"

"On my honor."

"H'm! One word more. What think you of Meyerbeer and Byron?"

"You have judged them by naming them together."

The count's carriage was at the door. The composer and his titled physician were driven to Gambara's residence. They ran upstairs and were soon in Marianna's presence.

As they entered Gambara threw himself into his wife's arms, who withdrew a step and averted her head. The husband also drew back, and, beaming on the count, said, in a husky voice:

"You might at least have left me my madness, monsieur."

Then his head drooped and he fell.

"What have you done?" cried Marianna, casting a look at her husband, in which disgust and pity were equally blended.

"He is dead drunk!"

The count with the help of his valet raised Gambara and laid him upon the bed; then Andrea left the house, his heart glad in horrid rapture.

The next day he purposely let the hour of his daily visit pass by; he was beginning to fear that he had been duped by himself, and had paid too dearly for the comfort and virtue of that humble couple whose peace he had for ever destroyed.

At length Giardini came bringing a note from Marianna.

"Come," she wrote, "the harm done is not so great as you desired, cruel man."

"Eccellenza," said the cook, while Andrea was dressing,

"you entertained right royally last night. But you must allow that, apart from the wines, which were excellent, your *maitre d'hôtel* did not produce a single dish worthy an epicure's table. You won't deny, I suppose, that the dish placed before you, on the day you honored my table with your presence, was superlatively better than those that sullied your service of plate last evening? Consequently, when I awoke this morning, I remembered the promise you had made me to become your chef. I henceforth consider myself as one of your household."

"I have had the same thought in my mind for the past few days," replied Andrea. "I have mentioned your name to the Austrian ambassador, and you will be allowed to recross the Alps as soon as you please. In Croatia I have a castle which I seldom visit. There you may combine the offices of porter, butler, cook, and steward, with two hundred crowns a year. This emolument will also be that of your wife, who can do the rest of the work. You can there try all your experiments *in anima vili*—that is to say, on the stomachs of my vassals. Here is a cheque for the costs of your journey."

Giardini kissed the count's hand, in the Neapolitan fashion.

"Eccellenza," said he, "I accept the cheque, but not the position. It would be dishonoring in me to give up my art and lose the good opinion of the most perfect epicures, who are undoubtedly those of Paris."

When Andrea arrived at Gambara's apartments the composer arose and came forward to meet him.

"My generous friend," said he frankly, "either it is that you took advantage of the weakness of my head to play a joke on me last night, or else your brain is no whit stronger, when testing the heady fumes of our native Latium, than mine is. I choose the latter hypothesis; I prefer to doubt your stomach than your heart. Be this as it may, I from this renounce the use of wine—for ever. Last evening the abuse of good liqueur led me into culpable folly. When I call to

mind that I nearly degraded ——” He glanced in terror at Marianna.

“As to that wretched opera you took me to hear, I have thought it over; it is naught but music made by very ordinary methods; a heap of piled-up notes—*verba et voces*. It is but the dregs of the nectar which I quaff in deep draughts as I reproduce the heavenly music that I hear. I know the origin of those patched-up phrases. That Gloire à la Providence is too like Handel; the chorus of knights on their way to the lists is closely related to the Scotch air in ‘La Dame Blanche.’ In short, if the opera is pleasing, it is simply because the music is borrowed from everybody and is therefore generally known.

“I must now leave you, my dear friend. Since morning I have had an idea seething in my brain which bids me rise to God on the wings of song; but I wished to see you and say this much to you. Adieu! I go to ask forgiveness of my Muse. We shall meet this evening at dinner; but no more wine—at least not for me. Oh! I am firmly resolved——”

“I give him up,” said Andrea, blushing violently.

“You enlighten my conscience,” said Marianna, “I dared not question it. My friend, my friend, the fault is not ours; he *won’t* let us cure him.”

Six years later, in January, 1837, such musical artists as were unlucky enough to injure their wind or string instruments were in the habit of taking them to the Rue Froidman-teau, to a squalid, disreputable house where the said instruments were repaired by an old Italian named Gambara, who resided on the sixth floor.

For the past five years this man had lived alone, his wife having deserted him. An instrument, called by him a *pan-harmonicon*, from which he expected fame, had been sold at auction by the sheriff, on the Place du Châtelet, in addition to a great pile of musical manuscript thickly scrawled. The

day after the sale, this said paper appeared in the markets wrapped around pats of butter, fish, and fruits.

In this manner the three grand operas—of which the poor man would often boast, though a once-celebrated Neapolitan cook, now a vendor of broken victuals, declared they were but a mass of rubbish—were scattered throughout Paris in the baskets of hucksters. But what matter?—the landlord had gotten his rent, the sheriff's men their fees.

The Neapolitan victual-monger, who had as regular customers the prostitutes of the Rue Froidmanteau for his warmed-up scraps, which were the crumbs from the fine banquets given by society on the previous night, was always ready to tell that Signora Gambara had gone off to Italy with a nobleman of Milan, and no one knew what had become of her. Weary of poverty and wretchedness, she was more than likely ruining the count by a career of extravagant luxury, for they adored each other with so fierce a passion that he had never in all his Neapolitan experience beheld the like.

Toward the end of this same month, January, one evening as Giardini was chatting with a girl, who had chanced in to buy her supper, about the beautiful Marianna, so pure, so glorious, so nobly self-devoted, and who had, notwithstanding, gone the *way of all the rest*, the street-girl and the wife of Giardini noticed in the street a tall, thin woman, with a sunburnt, dusty face; a nervous walking skeleton, who was peering at all the numbers and trying to recognize a house.

"Ecco la Marianna!" cried Giardini.

Marianna recognized the one-time cook in the poor object, but gave no heed to the misfortunes which had reduced him to his present wretched trade as a dealer in second-hand food. She went in and sat down; she had walked from Fontainebleau; she had walked fourteen leagues that day, after begging her bread from Turin to Paris.

The sight of her horrified that miserable trio. Of all her marvelous loveliness naught now remained but a pair of fading,

anguished eyes. The one thing faithful to her was misfortune.

The old mender of instruments heartily welcomed her; he greeted her with inexpressible joy.

"Here you are, my poor Marianna!" he said affectionately. "During your absence they sold my instrument and my operas."

It would have been a difficult job to kill the fatted calf for the prodigal returned; but Giardini produced the fag-end of a salmon, the street-walker paid for the wine, Gambara found the bread, Signora Giardini lent a table-cloth, and these diverse unfortunates supped together in the musician's garret.

When questioned about her adventures, Marianna refused to reply, but she raised her fine eyes to heaven and whispered to Giardini:

"He married a ballet-girl."

"And how do you mean to live?" asked the girl. "The journey from Milan has killed you and——"

"Made me an old woman," said Marianna. "No, it is not fatigue, not poverty, it is grief that has done this."

"Bah! why then did you never send your man here any money?"

Marianna only answered by a look, but it stabbed the woman to the heart.

"She ain't proud at all! oh, no!" she exclaimed. "But much good it has done her," she whispered in Giardini's ear.

That year it seemed that every musician took extraordinary care of his instrument, and the business of repairing them dropped to *nil*, or to less than sufficient to provide for the daily bread of that poor household. The wife earned little by her needle, and they were compelled to turn their talents to account in the meanest occupation.

In the dusk they would go together to the Champs-Élysées and sing duets, and Gambara, poor soul, accompanied on a wretched guitar. On the way thither Marianna, who always

concealed her head under a sort of veil of lawn, would take her husband to a grocery in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré and give him two or three nips of brandy to make him tipsy ; otherwise he could not play but intolerably. Then they would stand up together before the gay world seated on chairs along the esplanade, and the greatest genius of the day, the unrecognized Orpheus of modern music, played fragments of his operas to the crowd. These were so remarkable that they were able to extract a few sous from Parisian supineness.

One day a *dilettante* of the Bouffons happened to be sitting there, and, not recognizing from what opera they were taken, questioned the woman in the Grecian head-dress, when she held out the stamped, round metallic plate on which she collected her charity.

“I say, my dear, from what music is that ?”

“From the opera of ‘Mahomet,’” Marianna replied.

As Rossini had composed an opera, “Mahomet II.,” the gentleman remarked to the lady :

“What a pity that they will not give us at the Italiens those works of Rossini that are known the least. Certain it is that this is glorious music.”

Gambara smiled.

A few days ago it was necessary for this poor couple to pay the paltry sum of thirty-six francs as arrears of rent due on their miserable garret. The grocer refused to give credit for the brandy with which Marianna plied her husband to enable him to play. Gambara was thus so atrociously bad that it became insufferable ; the ears of the rich were irresponsive—the tin bottle-stand remained empty.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when a beautiful Italian, the Principessa Massimilla di Varese,* took pity on the poor creatures. She gave Marianna forty francs and questioned both, after discovering from the wife's thanks that she was a

* See “Massimilla Doni.”

Venetian. Prince Emilio, who accompanied his wife, would learn the history of their distress, and Marianna detailed all, making no complaints against God or man.

"Madame," said Gambara, who was not drunk, "we are the victims of our own superiority. My music is good; but so soon as music rises from sensation to idea, only persons of genius should be the hearers, for only they are capable of responding to it! It has been my misfortune to hear the chorus of angels; I believed that men could understand those strains. It is thus with women when their love assumes a divine aspect: men can no longer comprehend them."

These words were well worth the forty francs bestowed by Massimilla; she drew out another gold-piece from her purse, saying, as she gave it to Marianna, that she would write Andrea Marcosini.

"Do not write him, madame!" exclaimed Marianna. "And God grant you may be beautiful for ever!"

"Let us provide for them," said the princess to her husband; "this man has remained faithful to the IDEAL which *we* have killed."

When Gambara saw the gold he wept; then there came to him a vague reminiscence of some old scientific experiment, and the wretched composer, as he wiped away his tears, uttered these words, which the attendant circumstances make piteous:

"Water is produced by burning."



1852-1853



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